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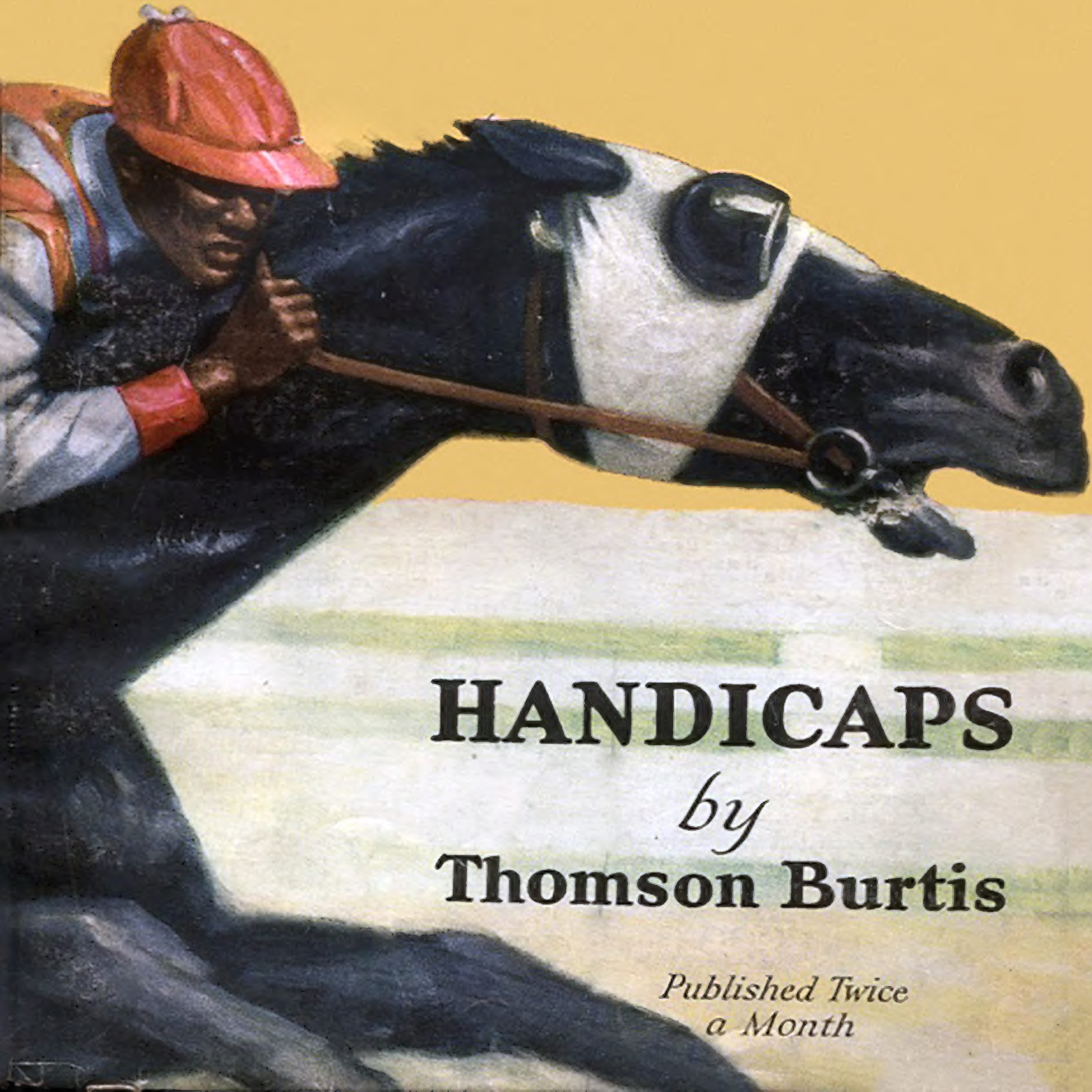

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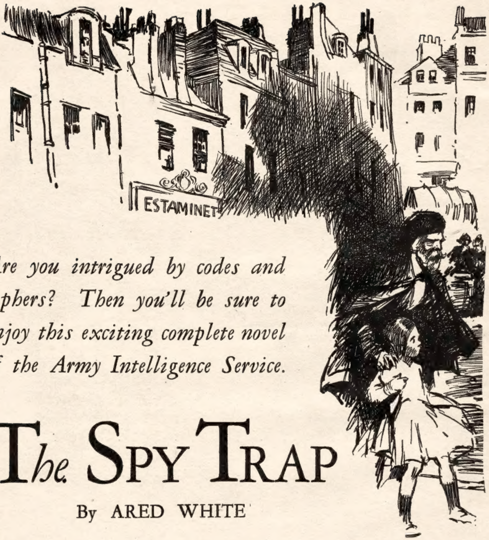


Are you intrigued by codes and ciphers? Then you'll be sure to enjoy this exciting complete novel of the Army Intelligence Service.

The SPY TRAP

By ARED WHITE

CHAPTER I

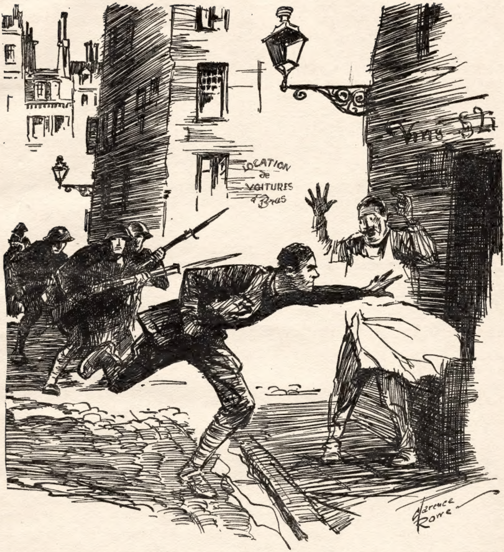
A DEAD ONE LAUGHS

CAPTAIN FOX ELTON sat listening with polite interest to the amazing conversation between the chiefs of the American and French espionage services. If the black picture drawn by the Frenchman stirred him with uneasy foreboding, there was no hint of any such emotion in his clear blue eyes and serenely calm features, even [illegible] he knew [illegible] follow with ac[illegible] words. [illegible] Monsieur le Colonel Ourq!" the American G-2 colonel broke in sharply.

He shifted uncomfortably in his new swivel chair and his ponderous red face registered an irritated perplexity, as one whose credence is being imposed upon.

"One moment you tell me that the Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim has been put to the guillotine and in the next breath you say it must be he who is operating the spy nest at Paris."

"But yes, my Colonel," exclaimed the Frenchman earnestly. "I will risk my name that it is none other than the Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim himself."



"You mean the guillotine wasn't sharp —or just how do you get him back on earth after chopping off his head?" Colonel Rand's voice was peremptory.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"How can I say, my Colonel?" he replied. "We kill Von Strindheim. Identification is perfect—the evidence most complete. One week, maybe two, and *voilà*—the baron is back again."

"Then I take it you killed the wrong man. Is that the idea, monsieur?"

"That, my Colonel, is the deep mystery," said Colonel Ourq desperately. "The evidence of the baron's death is not to be disputed. We have investigated every possible ruse, every trick—and always we come back to the same conclusion: Von Strindheim is dead. For years the baron was under the surveillance of our secret police in Paris—yes, for seven years before the war. I myself knew him as I know you. Not until six weeks ago were we able to trap him for what he was, the most dangerous man in all the German spy system in France. I myself, with my own eyes, saw his head drop under the guillotine, my Colonel.

And yet will I vow that Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim lives at this moment."

Colonel Rand got up to pace the floor of the spacious intelligence office at American headquarters. His face was deeply lined; mingled perplexity and irritation. At the end of several moments of strained silence he halted directly in front of the French officer and shot another query at him.

"But couldn't the baron, with all his gifts, have trained some one else to his methods, some one to carry on his work here in Paris after he had become a—a casualty, so to speak?"

Colonel Ourq responded with the inevitable shrug of negation.

"But no. Never!" he exclaimed; adding fervently, "Is it not so of all the great geniuses—that they trained many, and yet no one who could approach their own power? The baron is a genius, my Colonel, an evil genius with the mind of the devil and the sly cunning of a thousand devils. In some strange way Von Strindheim has survived his own death. Yes, my Colonel, I see what is in your mind. My most brilliant operatives touch a finger to their brows—thus—and smile insinuatingly at me when my back is turned, yet it does not weaken my certainty that the baron works in Paris today."

"No doubt," said Colonel Rand, unconvinced. "No doubt you have your reasons, but it does stump me to know just where to begin cooperating with you, in view of the unusual French official attitude that the man is dead, and your own insistence that he is alive. Certainly it would help us if you would reconcile the conflict of opinion by giving us your theories in detail."

"There are many theories one might arrive at," responded the French officer. "But—*mon dieu*—how am I to reconcile them? On one hand, as I have told you, I saw Baron Erich executed. On the other, his evil genius continues to mock us. Things happen that reveal to me the baron's incomparable technique, the devilish power of intrigue and evasion that no other man could possess so fully—no more than the matchless Napoleon could have had an understudy of power equal to his own!"

"Have you any concrete evidence of the baron's existence, monsieur?" Colonel Rand persisted, in his unwillingness to countenance so grotesque a theory even from as clever a man as Colonel Ourq.

The French officer hesitated a moment, then drew from the inner pocket of his tunic a thin leather folder. From the folder he took a small green tinted envelope and handed it, with reluctance, to the American.

"There is this, which I will permit you to see, although it is, as you will be able to appreciate, very embarrassing to me," said the Frenchman.

Colonel Rand opened the envelope and drew forth a sheet of fine linen paper upon which was written the name—*M. le Colonel Ourq*—in French letters whose shaping disclosed a German hand. Under the address was an endless array of figures, of which Rand was able to make nothing.

"Code?" he inquired.

"Yes, cipher. Von Strindheim's old favorite cipher, the one he used until we broke it down finally, since when to the best of our knowledge, he has used none."

"Here, Elton," said Rand, turning to his assistant. "You are the code expert of our official family. What do you make of this?"

CAPTAIN ELTON took the missive and scrutinized it carefully, comparing the groupings and arrangement of numerals with German cipher messages he had broken down in the past. He concentrated upon the first grouping which read:

22 11—26 25—11—37—17—21—22—27—17
11—36 44—31—37

It required only a few moments of study to convince the young officer that while undoubtedly it was a form of alphabetical cipher, hours, even days of patient labor would be required before he could reduce the message to French. He handed the sheet of paper back to Colonel Rand with a terse statement to that effect.

"But it reduces into English," said the Frenchman. "That was Von Strindheim's favorite prank, one that foiled our best experts for months. Here, my Colonel, I will give you the key and you shall read it for yourself."

Colonel Ourq seated himself at Rand's desk and quickly but painstakingly wrote out the key, handing it to the American. It read:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
2.	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
3.	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
4.	V	W	X	Y	Z		

"You see, messieurs," Colonel Ourq explained, "Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim used a sort of plotting, or map coordinating system. Take the first figure in his message—22. The first numeral identifies the column from top to bottom in the alphabet. Thus the numeral 2 indicates that the letter is in the second row. The second numeral refers to the position of the letter from left to right. Thus the second 2 would place the letter intended definitely as I. It is the same as plotting with map coordinates and equally simple. At the point in the table where the numbers meet, there is your letter. It took us many weary weeks of effort to break the cipher down—largely because it reduces into English. But with the key I have given you, my Colonel, any one may read it in a moment."

Colonel Rand, instead of turning the cipher over to his expert operative, tried his own skill upon it with the key before him. The mystic symbols yielded promptly to intelligible words. He took a pencil and wrote it out, slowly at first, then with easy rapidity.

22 (I) 11—26 (am)
25—11—37—17—21—22—27—17 (laughing)
11—36 (at) 44—31—37 (you)

When he had completed the whole message, there lay before him this taunting message:

> I am laughing at you. The German Haussman you sent has met his just reward. Soon our Imperial Army shall invest Paris and I expect the honor of your presence at dinner at the Hotel Crillon. With assurances of my profound amusement, I beg to remain,
>
> —VON STRINDHEIM

"My associates in the second bureau—" The Frenchman hastened to explain, the color suffusing his cheeks as he observed Colonel Rand had read the message—"all of them insist that it is nothing more than a very clever forgery by a German operative who has taken the baron's place. Very naturally they ask, as you have asked, how could Von Strindheim write this when he is dead? But even they were at a loss for words, my Colonel, when the most celebrated of our experts in handwriting pronounced the figures and the signature in the handwriting of the baron himself. You see, we had many established specimens of his craft for purposes of comparison."

Colonel Rand rubbed his wrinkled brow vigorously.

"You know how fond these Prussians are of grotesque tricks?" he protested stoutly. "So if it is really Von Strindheim's hand and not a forgery, isn't it more rational, Colonel, to conclude that the baron wrote it for use in event he became a casualty, so to speak? An antemortem trick—to muddy the water in favor of his fellow operatives after his own death?"

"Ah, but that very point was brought up, my Colonel, and as quickly settled. For a dozen experts testified that the ink was not more than a few hours upon the paper when it reached me through the mails. And that was a fortnight ago—a full ten days after the baron's supposed demise, of which I was an official witness."

"What is the reference to the German, Haussman, in the message?" inquired Rand. "Does that have any special significance?"

"*Mon dieu*, my Colonel! That is the

terrible part of it all! For months we plan it. Haussman, the German operative—a clever rogue to whom we made the first quarter of a payment of one million francs—one million francs to deliver to us the information that would uncover the Prussian spy nest in Paris. Fifty lives—fifty of our own best operatives gone—dead—no one knows how or where. My Colonel, they disappear forever, once they take up this deadly scent on the trail of Von Strindheim in Paris. A million francs was little enough to pay the traitor Haussman if he could reveal their stronghold. But in spite of our own careful training, our thorough secrecy and Haussman's own well known cleverness, you have read yourself what happened to him. Even without the evidence of Von Strindheim's signature, I should have recognized this as his work, for there is none other endowed with the devilish power to look into men's minds and read their innermost souls as he must have read Haussman's."

The American colonel resumed his restless pacing of the floor, the while he rubbed his forehead as if to induce a greater intensity of thought while he sought to reduce the Frenchman's remarkable statements to some logical and coherent basis. One thing was certain—a baffling German spy center operated in Paris in defiance of the best French efforts. Another thing was equally certain—the German operatives were furnishing the German imperial general staff with detailed information of everything of military value that occurred in France. That was disclosed by the messages which the astute Elton had deciphered a few days before when he unearthed a German message center within the American fighting lines, in the Vosges Mountains.

On the basis of Elton's achievements, the idea of having him work with the French in Paris had been evolved—and eagerly seized upon by the French espionage bureau. If Elton had ferreted out the transmission station in the red Vosges, it was not incredible that he might be able to pit his mind against the master spies in the French capital. But the French espionage chieftain's insistence that Von Strindheim was the man to be sought did not, as Colonel Rand saw it, put his star assistant upon a tangible or hopeful trail. Better that Elton bend his efforts in other directions than chase a will-o'-the-wisp of French imagination, imagination possibly warped by the stress of years of war.

Colonel Rand finally turned to Elton.

"What do you make of it all?" he inquired. "So far you've had a listening rôle, but since you are the one chiefly concerned, after all, I'd like to have the benefit of your opinion, if you have any."

"My experience as a Government operative at home has taught me that anything is possible," Elton said thoughtfully. "Even though a man has been executed it is conceivable that in some miraculous way he escaped death, or another was executed in his place. But, assuming that Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim is alive, by some miracle, I can't fathom why he would want to advertise his presence on earth. Can't you see how tremendously it would be to his advantage to have the Allies think him dead?"

"That's something to explain," said Colonel Rand, turning sharply to the French officer. "The man you've pictured to us, Colonel, certainly would have brains enough to make very good use of such an advantage as being thought dead."

Colonel Ourq forgot his politeness long enough to laugh derisively.

"Ah, but you do not reckon with the arrogant vanity of Von Strindheim," he cried. "The baron's vanity is his great weakness. His boastfulness is without limit. Once he wrote to me boasting that he had dined the night before in my own home. And—*diable!*—I found the stub of his monogrammed cigaret in my ash tray. Another time he warned me that he would visit the Opera Comique on a certain evening. Still another time—but he is forever boasting. Von Strindheim, my Colonel, would rather die than be thought dead. The chase would lose its zest for him. He seems to like to think of himself as a master craftsman, giving what you call the handicap to us who try to trap him. I have even, messieurs, found the cigaret stub of Von Strindheim on the floor of my own office, a cigaret with a coronet of gold over the initials, 'VS'."

THE AMERICAN espionage colonel studied his watch without replying. It was well past midnight. Since early forenoon they had been closeted with Colonel Ourq, going over the baffling enigma of the Prussian spy center in Paris. Palpably they were at an *impasse* on the subject of Von Strindheim. And Colonel Rand felt himself at the end of his patience, as well as his endurance, for the time being. He cleared his face of its skeptical scowl and spoke with studied politeness, the politeness demanded by official relations.

"We are indebted to you, Monsieur le Colonel Ourq," he announced. "The hour is very late and I fear we have drawn upon your energies quite enough for one day. Permit us to think upon what you have said, to examine the facts you have been kind enough to give us—and tomorrow we will meet with you again to give you our answer—say at the hour of noon."

"As you will, messieurs," replied Colonel Ourq. He rose and bowed gravely. "My services are at your disposal tomorrow, or for so long as you may desire. Until twelve of the clock tomorrow, adieu."

When the French officer had bowed himself out, Colonel Rand turned to Elton and shook his head.

"Putting aside our friend's slightly shell shocked notions about Von Strindheim, it is clear enough that the Boche spy nest in Paris is pretty solidly entrenched," he said gloomily. "Whoever it is that's running the thing, he must be pretty well equipped with brains, don't you say?"

"Decidedly," Elton responded. "But frankly I am not so skeptical of Von Strindheim's existence as you appear to be, sir."

"You mean you accept that story of the baron's coming back to life, Elton?" Colonel Rand said.

"I wouldn't go so far as that. But there's some doubt, after hearing the whole story, about who it was the French executed. Yes, even in the face of their official witnesses who saw the execution, there may have been a mistake."

"But, Elton, it's fatal to start into this thing on a false assumption. Sticking your head into a spy nest looking for a man who, according to all rational accounts, is dead—it doesn't sound very promising to me."

"That would be safer than ignoring a clever rascal as dead when he was really alive. Besides, that isn't the most vital part of it, for that matter. We've got to consider every angle. But there's one thing, sir, that must not be lost sight of at any time. It's no ordinary mortal we have to deal with, in any event."

Colonel Rand shook himself and suppressed a yawn.

"Well, let's sleep on it," he said with finality. "You go over the case in detail in the morning and let me know what you think after a night's sleep. If fifty French operatives have disappeared to date, I'm not in any hurry to have our own most valuable operative gobbled up in the black void of underground Paris. Although—if we thought there was a chance of getting anywhere—it's worth any risk to stop those Boche *espions* from tipping everything to the German army in advance."

"Very good, sir," said Elton nonchalantly. "I'll go over everything Ourq told us and see what the situation looks like after a detailed analysis. Good night, sir."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST STEPS

INSTEAD of going to his quarters for sleep upon leaving the American espionage chief, Captain Elton walked down the long dark corridor of the stone headquarters building and entered his own cheerless cubbyhole of an office. The room, once the quarters of an important French *sous-officier* when the place was part of a French regimental garrison, grudgingly yielded room for Elton's broad desk and the jumbled piles of books which he used in his specialty of reducing German cipher and code messages into plain English.

There was no thought of sleep. Never in his career as a Department of Justice operative, before he was loaned to the Army for use in the war, had Elton faced a case that presented so many difficult aspects at the outset, such danger. Certainly, ordinary methods would not apply in a case where more than two-score French operatives had vanished. If he could hope to succeed where they had failed, it would mean the most painstaking preparation of his work, and the cleverest use of his resources and wits once he had taken up the trail. Even then it might be little better than an impudent gamble with death.

Elton turned first to the two photographs which the French colonel had furnished him of the elusive and mysterious Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim. It was this amazing personality who quickened his interest. The man who had baffled the whole of the French secret service, who had played hide-and-seek with his life with a recklessness that had astounded his pursuers. First of all must be settled the question of whether Von Strindheim really lived, or was represented by an exceptionally gifted disciple of Von Strindheim's own training.

The first of the two photographs showed the baron as a young officer in the uniform of a Prussian grenadier regiment. It dated back no less than a dozen years, long before Von Strindheim came to France, perhaps even before he had embarked upon his career in the secret service. Elton sat looking at it intently for many minutes, not without a certain admiration for the cold, arrogant features that revealed something of the agile, resourceful mind of the man.

The Von Strindheim eyes and mouth were the two outstanding features in the fellow's remarkable face. Elton could see, even from an uncolored photograph of ancient vintage, that the eyes were a peculiar translucent gray that laughed in a cold, mocking sort of way. The lips were thin and straight, except at the ends where they curled sharply downward into the hint of a sneer. His face was full without being fat, finely molded, with an aquiline nose that just escaped being hawk-like. His brow and hair were covered by his military cap, set at a rakish angle, so that the vizor dipped close above his left eye and concealed his hair. Such of the physique as was shown by the picture was that of a rather slight, well knit man, square shouldered and stiffly erect.

An older man was revealed by the second photograph. It was a French official photograph taken at Le Bourget just before the victim's head fell under the blade of a military guillotine. Elton reckoned that Von Strindheim must have been twenty-five when he posed for the first camera. The later French photo was that of a man in his middle thirties. These years had only slightly changed the Von Strindheim features. The eyes were colder and harder, and had lost the insulting amusement with which they once had looked out upon the world. Natural enough, in view of the fact that the man awaited the guillotine. The line of the mouth was thinner and firmer and the curve at the ends drawn more sharply. Under a powerful glass Elton noted, too, that the second Von Strindheim picture lacked the fire and mental *élan* of the first; there was something about it that suggested a lesser personage than that revealed by the first. Years of peril, and imminence of death, might fully account for that.

When at last he had completed his scrutiny of the two photographs of Von Strindheim, Elton settled back in his chair and fixed his mind intently upon the detailed disclosures made by the French colonel. Hours of thoughtful comparison and analysis of every pertinent fact and theory that Colonel Ourq had advanced during the day shed no new light upon the grim facts of German spy operations in Paris. Nor was there anything to be found in the Frenchman's grim outline of the situation that offered encouragement to the boldest and most resourceful American operative.

THERE was really no length to which the French military authorities had not gone. At five successive places they had located the secret lair in Paris—and each time had seized the place with an armed poilu platoon after disguised operatives failed to return. Each time the French moved in with force, it was to find themselves holding the empty bag. The Germans had simply moved on, leaving an empty trail behind them. It was clear that in the years before the war they had planned with infinite pains for just such contingencies. When smoked out it was simply a matter of moving on to another prepared position, much as a front line battalion retires into successive lines of trenches and strongholds in the face of irresistible battle pressure.

Only by the sheerest good fortune had Colonel Ourq's operatives picked up the trail again, following the arrest and execution of Von Strindheim and the smashing of a rendezvous in the Rue Pigalle. Two French operatives had trailed a suspect to a medieval stone building on the Rue Chambron, a week before. One of them had followed the fellow into the dilapidated café on the ground floor of the building. When, three hours later, he had not emerged, his associate sounded the alarm. The French espionage chief himself prevented an armed rush upon the building. Each time that he had smothered a nest with force, it had taken weeks, months of effort to get track of the new rendezvous. So he decided to approach the problem more circumspectly. In order to allay possible suspicion, he caused a desultory search to be made of the entire neighborhood and then left the suspected nest in peace, intent upon devising some more subtle means of approach.

First, M. le colonel spent a week in discreet investigation of the past and present history of the building under suspicion. This yielded nothing. The place was the undisputed ancestral property of an officer of the French army, now with his regiment at the Front. The upper floors were used as a cheap lodging for river workers along the nearby River Seine. The ground floor was occupied by a small French café of the cheapest and shabbiest class. The Frenchman who conducted these humble enterprises was of unquestioned loyalty. Except for the undisputed fact that another of his operatives had disappeared mysteriously upon entering the place—a fact having the Von Strindheim earmarks—Colonel Ourq might have been satisfied to drop the place from observation. As it was he finally used the traitor Haussman, only to receive the mocking letter of a few days later, signed Von Strindheim.

BY SUNRISE Captain Elton had reached one very definite conclusion. One master continued to direct the destiny of the German spy center in Paris. No mere successor to the brilliant operative who conducted the work in the early stages of the war could have carried on with such unerring certainty. More particularly, a successor would not have developed the arrogant confidence in himself to flaunt his victories in the French official face so soon after Von Strindheim's demise. Perhaps, he concluded, the French had executed Von Strindheim at Le Bourget. But they had not put to sleep the sinister mind that moved the pawns in the game of military espionage inside the French lines.

Shortly before noon, when he reported for the conference with the espionage chiefs, Colonel Rand greeted him impatiently.

"Well, Elton, what do you make of it all after a night's sleep?" the colonel inquired.

"I haven't had a night's sleep, sir."

Elton smiled. "In fact I haven't had my uniform off or closed my eyes."

"You certainly look like a man who's slept!" exclaimed Colonel Rand. "Not even red around the eyes. However, that's not the point. Sleep or no sleep, what's the situation? Ourq will be here in a moment to know whether you're going to try your hand at his fox hunt. What's the answer?"

"Tell him no—most emphatically," said Elton.

"It doesn't look good to you, eh?"

"Not very inviting, sir—and please leave no uncertainty in his mind that I, if I have any choice in the matter, wash my hands of the whole mess."

Colonel Rand scowled at the floor briefly.

"I think you're using your head, Elton," he replied. "What chance would we have mixing in with this ancient spy game which they've been playing so many centuries they've got it down to a fine art? We've got need enough of you here."

Colonel Ourq entered in a minute, expectant, but not unmindful of the courtesies demanded by French military custom. He bowed and saluted, made elegant inquiry after the health of both officers, as to whether they had rested well, and waited patiently for the American colonel to broach the subject of official business.

"We have decided, Monsieur le Colonel, that we can not spare Captain Elton to assist you at this time." Colonel Rand announced this decision bluntly, when the amenities finally had been disposed of. "You see, Elton is the one really expert cipher man we've got to depend on—"

"Ah, but it is only the officer who can break down cipher who could hope for success," put in the Frenchman, his long thin face registering disappointment at the American's words. "I had hoped, perhaps, messieurs, you would see your way clear to help us in this most important of all cases."

"I'm sorry, Monsieur le Colonel," Colonel Rand said with finality. "But I left the decision to the captain and I take it he does not feel his experience or his knowledge of Paris would justify such presumption as to conclude he might win where you have failed."

"I am sorry," said Ourq gloomily, bowing his acceptance of the verdict. In his disappointment he betrayed the shameless reason for wishing to inveigle the American operatives into the chase. "I had thought, perhaps, that if the Americans also failed, those of my own superiors who now criticize me might become more indulgent of my efforts. *Adieu, messieurs.*"

"May I ask Monsieur le Colonel one question?" Captain Elton said. "Did I understand you correctly as saying yesterday that you have a German spy under observation at the American aviation center at Orly?"

"Ay, yes, Captain." Colonel Ourq looked searchingly at the American captain for a moment as if to divine the reason for the question, then added, "But may I most respectfully request, my comrades, that you do not molest the wretch. An ordinary *espion* of no great consequence, I assure you. But perhaps one of Von Strindheim's army. He serves as an American ground corporal, and our hope is that his trail may lead us one day to his master if we but have patience."

"Thank you," said Elton nonchalantly. "I was merely a bit curious—and I assure you that I will in no way molest your spy or spoil your plan of watching his trail."

"Certainly not, when the French request it," Colonel Rand spoke up. "We want to cooperate in every way possible with the French secret service."

Colonel Ourq bowed his acknowledgment of the colonel's assurance, clicked his heels, saluted perfectly and departed.

"THANK heaven that's over!" said Colonel Rand. "Now we can get back to our own business again."

"But, sir, I'm afraid it isn't over," said Captain Elton politely. "And besides, isn't that Paris nest our business, our most important business?"

The colonel turned sharply upon his junior officer.

"What do you mean by that amazing statement, please tell me?" he demanded.

"I mean, sir," said Elton, "that I've decided to try my hand and wits at hound and fox, to go to the bottom of this thing and smoke out the Kaiser's pet *espion* in Paris."

"You mean—" Colonel Rand broke off into speechlessness and stood staring at Elton for several moments. "Didn't you just tell me ten minutes ago that you'd decided to do nothing of the sort?"

"No, sir. I recall making no such statement to the colonel."

"See here, Elton; if this is some sort of silly jest, you're carrying it too far. My hearing is perfect, my senses normal. Now just what is it you would have me believe that my ears heard?"

"But if the Colonel will recall my words, I requested you to tell the Frenchman I had refused to tackle the job."

"Quite the same thing. Just what are you driving at?"

"Simply this, sir. I didn't want Colonel Ourq to know what I'm about. It's a mighty ticklish game I'm up against at best—and I didn't want a lot of French intelligence officers to know about it in advance. I'm even sorry it's necessary for you to know what's up, and I must have your word that no one else will be let in on it—not even the general."

Colonel Rand was left staring again.

"You've sized this game up and appreciate just what you're up against?"

"Perfectly. It's a long shot, but I worked out my preliminary plans and I'm going to put them into execution."

"What are they?"

Captain Elton pursed his lips and smiled enigmatically.

"If the Colonel will excuse me," he replied, "I'll keep that to myself."

"My experience and advice in this work might be very helpful to you, Elton. I might point out something you have overlooked."

"I appreciate that fact, sir. But I fear we might not agree—especially on the subject of Von Strindheim. Besides, if I keep my own counsel, I'll not have to worry about the danger of official complications—such as the general asking you, and then letting a word drop to the French of what I was about."

"Von Strindheim!" Colonel Rand bit the word out. "You're not accepting any of that nonsense from Ourq, I hope, as a basis for starting your work. If you are you'd better stay where you are. That Paris spy nest is not any branch of the home for feeble minded."

"I'm not accepting it and I'm not rejecting it. I'm going in with an open mind on that subject, but with my mind made up on one point: the man I must deal with is just as clever as Von Strindheim is described as being. At least you will agree to that much."

The colonel indulged in his favorite thought provoking habit of rubbing his forehead vigorously.

"Well, I admire your spine, Elton, if not your judgment. But then, you surprised me when you landed that Boche nest out in the Vosges last week. Which reminds me that you have a promotion to major coming whenever you're ready to take the oath of office."

"I think that can wait, sir. I want to do nothing that will attract attention of any sort my way right now. As a matter of fact, I'm about to take a reduction to the ranks and change my name."

"Going to work under a cover-up, eh? Well, what is it to be this time—a second lieutenant or something of that sort?"

"A sergeant, sir. Sergeant Strothers, replacement casual. I knew of such a man in the cavalry on the Border—a deserter. He was killed a year ago in the foothills near Chihuahua, Mexico, under circumstances that I alone know in detail. Therefore, I am willing to risk that name. And now, sir, I request that as Sergeant Strothers I be assigned immediately to the aviation service at Orly—along with, say, a dozen other replacements."

"See here, Elton," Colonel Rand exclaimed as he divined the captain's apparent purpose. "We promised not to bother that spy down there. As Ourq told us, the French are working on him and it's bad business to break faith."

"I had no such idea as that," said Elton. "One other request: If I get into trouble with the American commander down there, I want no help of any kind from headquarters, no matter what the trouble is. I'm on my own, even if I get into a court-martial jam and am sent up for ten years. Also, transfer Sergeant Walters from here to headquarters at Paris with secret instructions to report at the Prison La Roquette or M. P. headquarters at any time any one sends for him."

Colonel Rand shook his head dubiously.

"I hope you know what you're about, Elton. This is no picnic you're embarking upon."

"After all," replied Elton calmly, "it's no more dangerous than the job held by a few million men who are fighting at the Front. And as old Sergeant Walters would say—it's all a part of the war game anyhow."

CHAPTER III

THE DESERTER

THE JOURNEY from American headquarters to the aviation assembly center at Orly might have been made in five hours by military automobile or in two hours by plane. Either kind of transportation was immediately available to an officer on a secret mission of the gravest importance to the whole Allied cause. But Elton chose the more leisurely method of proceeding south to St. Aignan, where he lost two precious days—one day in travel and one in taking his place as an enlisted casual in a replacement battalion. Another three days elapsed before he arrived at the aviation center. But his presence there, as one of twelve replacement casuals who had been duly requisitioned weeks before, was natural and logical, a mere matter of military routine.

On the left sleeve of Elton's blouse when he reported at Orly was the telltale markings of faded military glory—an unbleached area that betrayed recently removed chevrons. The pseudo ex-sergeant had brought this reduction upon himself with deliberation while at St. Aignan by the simple expedient of addressing a haughty second lieutenant without proper respect and deference. As he had expected, the evidence of reduced grade was seized upon promptly at Orly with mingled sympathy and suspicion—sympathy from the privates in the squadron's ground force, suspicion from officers and non-coms who reasoned logically that a busted sergeant was a person to be kept under observation.

From among the most voluble and uncouth of the privates in the squadron Elton carefully selected one as a confidant, a soldier with a large mouth, a noisy tongue and a ready sympathy for those who had felt the iron hand of discipline. On the second day at his new station, Elton, functioning under the *nom de guerre* of Private Strothers, took his new buddy into his confidence and poured his troubles into the other's sympathetic ear. He had been reduced to the ranks because of a miraculous run of hard luck. Some one had recognized him as a deserter from Mexican Border days. Only a miracle of friendship on his captain's part had saved him from being tried. But it had not saved him from being stripped of his chevrons and fed out as a replacement.

Exactly as Elton had expected, his confidence was betrayed by his gossiping comrade before reveille the next morning. By the end of the next day every man in the squadron knew that the new casual, Private Strothers, was a fellow with a hard record, a deserter from the Army on the Mexican Border. By the third day the report had traveled the military grapevine to the first sergeant's ear. Shortly after mess on that day Elton received a summons from the squadron adjutant, a bumptious youngster bustling with authority, whose peculiarities Elton had estimated carefully in advance of the inevitable interview.

"WHO GAVE you the fine notion that we wanted deserters in this outfit?" the lieutenant demanded by way of introducing the reason for the summons.

"Maybe you know what you're talking about. I don't," replied the bogus Strothers bluntly.

"You don't, eh?" gasped the young officer. The affront to his dignity enraged him. "You've had some military service, haven't you?" he roared.

"A year or so," the private admitted casually.

"Ever been taught how to address an officer?"

"Yes, an officer who acts like one," was the pointed reply.

"Damn your impudent hide! What do you mean by that?" The lieutenant was purple with rage by this time.

The private's mood was inflexible.

"Exactly what I said," he replied. "You act more like a petulant baby than an officer of the United States Army."

"I'd—I'd put you under arrest for that!" roared the lieutenant. "That's disrespect to your superior officer—that's worse—that's—" He broke off into impotent stuttering.

"Well, don't get all fussed up. What you want to see me about?" was the private's unruffled inquiry.

"You're a deserter, that's what I want to see you about!" barked the officer, pointing a tense finger of accusation straight at the soldier.

"How can I be a deserter, Lieutenant, when I'm standing right here in quarters listening to your guff this very minute? Sneer that off if you know how."

"If you address me like that again—I'll—I'll have you chucked in the hoosegow. I got it straight you're a deserter. Skipped the Army on the Border and came sneaking back in. Thought we wouldn't get wise to you!"

"Whoever says I deserted is an infernal liar!" the private shot back.

"I say it. We got the record on you. We got your own confession to one of the squadron here. Now let's hear you call me a liar!"

"With pleasure, Lieutenant. You're a dyed-in-the-wool, triple fanged, oily tongued liar of the deepest dye! Now swallow that and blow up until you bust, for all I care."

"Orderly! Call out the guard. Put this yellow cur under arrest!" the lieutenant bellowed at the top of his voice.

"You can't talk to me like that and get away with it," roared the chevronless soldier, suddenly stirring into action.

"You'll get twenty years in Leavenworth—or thirty—for this . . ."

How many years the officer might have added to his prediction of the soldier's probable sentence was not disclosed. He was interrupted by a hand of steel at the collar of his uniform. Elton dragged the lieutenant out of headquarters with a few lusty jerks of his arm. Before the headquarters clerks and orderlies could interfere, they saw the adjutant out in the open, alternately jerked and slapped, as helpless as a child on the horns of a bull, though his assailant was a somewhat smaller man.

As half a dozen soldiers, headed by a first sergeant, came rushing down upon this astounding exhibition of insubordination Elton discreetly released his hold and stepped back.

"Arrest that man!" screamed the adjutant. "Throw him in the hoosegow—and shoot him down if he tries to make a getaway!"

The first sergeant himself seized Elton roughly and remembered to salute the adjutant with his free hand.

"He'll not get away, sir," said the sergeant grimly. "We all saw it, sir."

"The man's a lunatic, or a dangerous criminal, I tell you," the breathless officer gasped. "Assaulted me without provocation—most unheard of outrage in my whole service."

"He tried to call me a deserter!" growled the prisoner. "I'm not taking that kind of talk from any one."

"You'll take a lot of things you ain't never thought of before," sneered the first sergeant, jerking the soldier back again and shoving him into the custody of half a dozen soldiers. "Take that bird to the cooler. Shoot him if he tries to bolt."

Two-thirds of the squadron had appeared magically at the scene by this time, gaping speechlessly at the man who had dared strike his superior officer in time of war. It was a firing squad offense if a court martial chose to go the limit of military law; certainly a matter of ten years' imprisonment even before a tender hearted military tribunal. The prisoner yielded without show of resistance and went off placidly with the escort.

"That's a fine morning's work you've pulled for yourself," the corporal in charge of the guard detail greeted him. "What kind of hop you filled up on anyhow?"

"I'm not having any ex-bank clerk in a Sam Browne bawling me out like I was a mangy setter," said the prisoner. "He started it."

"Yes—and he finished it, didn't he?" said the corporal. "Don't you know you can't get away with that kind of rough stuff against an officer?"

"Would you let some shavetail abuse you and call you a deserter?" the unhumbled offender asked sharply.

"Sure I would," affirmed the non-com unblushingly. "I'd let 'em call me anything. It's their privilege. Not saying I ain't got a temper and a right smart memory. But I'm waiting until we're back in civvies after the war, so I can do a first class job or two of it without having to spend the rest of my natural life in jail."

"Well, the jig was up anyhow," the other smiled stoically. "He had enough on me to cinch me for some old offense I thought they'd forgotten. So I reckon my fun didn't cost me much."

"Bad head work again," said the corporal. "If you meant that old desertion charge that's been rumored around here—why you'd got out of that easy 'longside what you're going to get now. Next to murder, hitting an officer is the unsafest stunt in the Army. Fact is, I don't think they'd done anything to you on that desertion charge, seeing as how you come back to do your stuff in the war."

"We'll let it go at that." The recalcitrant private ended the exchange. He smiled vaguely. "Anyhow it's my own funeral."

IF ELTON had any remaining uncertainties as to the serious course that was to follow, they were removed swiftly. Charges and specifications were read to him in an irate voice by the squadron major before the end of the day. They charged major violation of the article of war, a case for a general court martial. The hands of justice moved swiftly thereafter. Since the prisoner refused to make an official statement in his own behalf and took refuge in what passed for a sullen silence, he was whisked away the following morning to face the military tribunal at Paris headquarters.

His trial was brief and ominous. A dozen somber faced officers comprising the court sat in flinty silence through a recital of the facts by the outraged lieutenant, the first sergeant and several eyewitnesses who corroborated everything the lieutenant charged. Elton, in turn, gloomily admitted the offense and pleaded merely that he had lost his temper. The court went into closed session and reconvened with findings determined upon almost as quickly as the prisoner could be escorted from the room and led back again. A stony faced lieutenant-colonel possessed of a deep, funereal voice, arose to announce the findings of the court and pronounce the sentence.

"Of the charges—guilty," he said. "Of all the specifications—guilty. The sentence is dishonorable discharge from the service, forfeiture of all pay and allowances and confinement to a military prison at hard labor for a period of twenty-five years."

"That's an outrage, gentlemen!" The prisoner advanced a step toward the court, pointing a menacing finger at the members. "I demand—"

His sentence was cut off by a rough hand at his arm, the sergeant in charge of the guard of three armed military policemen. The sergeant hustled him out of the room.

"Any more wisecracks out of you and I'll drill you," the non-com stormed. "Me, I think you're a loco case, but you better not start anything while I got you on my hands."

At military police headquarters on Rue St. Anne, to which the prisoner was taken for transportation to Prison La Roquette, Elton finally prevailed upon the officer in charge to grant him a last request—that of notifying Sergeant Walters, at Paris headquarters, of his predicament.

"If it's giving you any comfort to advertise your crimes to your friends, I'll tell him you want to see him," the M. P. officer said. "But if I was in for the kind of a crime you pulled, I wouldn't want decent friends to know anything about it."

"Thank you, sir," said the prisoner humbly. "It'll cheer me a lot if I can have a few words with my old buddy."

An hour later the veteran Sergeant Walters, military intelligence operator and ally of Elton in his recent desperate invasion of the Belfort spy nest, appeared at the prison. He eyed the M. P. officer in a puzzled way when informed that Private Strothers, convicted of striking an officer, wanted to see him before being transferred to La Roquette.

"I don't remember the name, off hand," said Walters. "But then I've known a lot of hard eggs in my service."

"This is a tough one," said the officer. "Better keep your eyes on him. He may have some fast trick up his sleeve. The corporal here will take you up to the fifth floor."

NOT EVEN his long experience in facing strange and unexpected situations prevented an exclamation from Sergeant Walters when he saw, through the bars of a small cell, the familiar features of Captain Elton, in private's uniform and secured to an iron bunk by a heavy chain manacle.

"Why, sir—" Walters bit off his words in sudden recollection that there must be some good reason for the other's dire predicament. "So they got you in here, have they, Strothers?" he inquired. "Didn't recognize the name at first. What you want to see me about?"

"It's something personal, Sergeant," said the prisoner. "Word I want sent to my folks, without anybody else knowing who they are."

"Fair enough," said Walters. He motioned the sentry aside, out of hearing. "What's the meaning of all this, sir?" he inquired eagerly. "I knew there was something in the air when they sent me down to Paris, but I didn't—"

"I'm in a peck of real trouble," said Elton. "Beyond that I tell nothing at present. I'm to be transferred to the Prison La Roquette this afternoon. I want you to arrange the escort and have charge of it yourself. I'll tell you what else I want you to do later."

"I'll jump back to headquarters and fix that up easy enough," said Walters. "Only too glad to have a part in whatever you're doing. But I can't see—"

"A ticklish job in which I'm playing a lone game, Walters. You'll even tell the commander of Paris that I'm a prisoner in whom higher authority is taking no chance of a getaway. That'll be the reason you are taking over the job of landing me at La Roquette. Can you put that across?"

"They got their orders to let me do as I please, so it'll be easy." Walters smiled. "But don't I get in on the racket somewhere?"

"You'll be in lots of trouble before night—and I'll be out," Elton said. "Now please act as fast as you know how, and be sure to tell this Paris crew nothing."

CHAPTER IV

THE KAISER'S WINESHOP

AN HOUR later the forlorn private was duly surrendered by the American military police of the District of Paris into the custody of an armed detachment, dispatched by the American commander of troops in Paris to deliver him to the ancient French prison that had been turned over for American military use. The order was that every precaution be taken against escape. The escort of twelve men was armed with rifles, bayonets fixed, magazines filled with ball ammunition, which meant that the prisoner must arrive at La Roquette, at the other side of Paris, dead or alive.

Sergeant Walters, automatic pistol in his belt, flap unfastened, marched beside the convicted man. The escort under his command followed in columns of threes, ten paces in rear. They moved in silence through the narrow, traffic congested Rue St. Anne, the French civil populace yielding the sidewalk to them and gaping from the gutters at the strange cavalcade. Fragments of excited comment reached the escort as it moved along the streets. Imaginative Frenchmen quickly solved the riddle to their own satisfaction.

The soldiers were a firing squad. The American walking beside the *sous-officier*, the disheveled one with a stubbly face and wretched eyes, was a spy. They were taking him to the Seine to shoot him and cast his body into the muddy water. That was the American way. Groups began following on the flanks and rear, men, boys and old women. As the escort and its victim moved into the less frequented streets to the east, a motley rabble was trailing closely, drawn by the wartime blood lust, the grim fascination of seeing a firing squad perform.

The prisoner's anxiety became real at this unexpected development. He addressed Sergeant Walters, *sotto voce*, without turning his head from the front.

"So far that mob has played into my hands," he said. "But we've got to shake them now—at least force them back to a safe distance. They're dangerous enough to spoil everything, and I've got chances enough to take in the next half hour."

"I'll get rid of them, sir," whispered Walters.

He halted the escort and gave terse orders to one of his corporals who spoke French fluently. The corporal harangued the crowd back but it retreated only a few paces. Again and again he shouted to no avail until Sergeant Walters ordered the rear set of fours upon them with the threat of fixed bayonets. Whereupon they withdrew into the next square and followed at a discreet distance.

"At the next intersection," said Elton at the end of an interminable period of marching, "I'm going to leave you, and take your pistol with me."

Sergeant Walters looked sharply at Elton, fear in his face.

"My men know nothing," he whispered hoarsely. "They'll fire with ball ammunition if you make a play like that."

"It's up to you to hold their fire while I'm keeping you covered," Elton replied in a low tense voice. "As soon as I'm clear, around the first corner, you can turn them loose. After that hunt me like you meant business. In fact it'll be your business to hunt me down in earnest—if you can. But after a day or two, if you don't get my trail, drop it. Is that perfectly clear to you?"

The sergeant did not reply for a moment or two. His eyes were on the cobblestones under his feet. He ran his fingers unconsciously across the row of Service ribbons on his left breast, his hand pausing a moment upon the blue ribbon with tiny white stars—the Congressional Medal of Honor for distinguished bravery in action.

"It's the toughest thing I've ever been asked to do, sir," he replied presently. "No armed prisoner this side of hell could bluff me—and it's a painful thing to show the white feather right here before an armed escort with a couple of hundred frogs looking on from the background."

"I'm sorry, Walters. I know what they'll think; but there's no way around it. This is one case where it takes more guts to show yellow than to take a machine gun nest."

"Ain't there some other way, sir?" Walters persisted plaintively. The revolt in his soul against such a coup was clearly revealed by his voice. "Can't I turn this escort back and then you and me bolt it together?"

"See here, Walters!" Elton spoke so sharply that the sergeant raised his hand in warning lest their exchange be overheard by the men in rear. "I've spent days of misery and preparation leading up to this moment. Everything depends upon my next move. I've told you already more than I wanted any one to know. This is the most important game either of us ever sat in on—and everything depends upon the next fifteen minutes. Are you going to lend a hand?"

Walters groaned.

"Go ahead, sir, when you're ready," he said. "I'll take the gaff, if there's no way out of it."

They approached the intersection, streets lined with stone houses that stood in a solid wall flush upon the sidewalk. Elton's pulse was pounding in spite of his effort at calm. Not only his life, but the possibility of success for his military mission, must depend upon the eventualities of the next few minutes. If fortune frowned upon him, his own men might shoot him down. If he succeeded in this desperate move, it might only be to disappear into the black fastness that had swallowed up the flower of the French secret service.

"Now!"

HE SHOT the warning at Walters as they came within a stone throw of the Rue Desmanse. At the same moment he whipped his hand across to the sergeant's unfastened pistol holster, whipped out the Army automatic and thrust its ominous muzzle close to Walters' head. The alert soldiers of the escort swung their rifles from their shoulders, ready for action. In a twinkling a dozen muzzles loomed hungrily forward, safety locks released, fingers on triggers. Only the presence of Sergeant Walters, directly in the line of fire, saved Elton from instant death.

"Order them to hold their fire!" the prisoner shouted.

Sergeant Walters faced his command dumbly and lifted his hand. His face, had his men observed closely, was filled with disgust rather than fear as he halted them and called to them to order arms. Elton backed slowly toward the corner, Walters trailing closely as a shield. Even in the stress of this critical moment he read the black despair in Walters' ashen face. Walters shuffled along in silence, sick at heart. Twelve soldiers and two hundred French civilians witnesses of this humiliation. An American non-commissioned officer, weakening at the threat of a pistol, for no better apparent reason than to preserve his own cowardly carcass. An outrage against all decent traditions of the Service.

"I'm sorry," Elton consoled him.

"It's the toughest thing I ever tried," said Walters grimly. "But take care of yourself, sir, and good luck to you."

"Thanks, Walters; I'll need your good wishes."

He broke around the corner without another word. By running at top speed he had estimated that he would be able to reach a turn in the tortuous thoroughfare that would shield him from gunfire and enable him to reach a second turn and a third that would take him unto the Rue Chambron. He had barely reached the first turn before the first scattering fire was at his heels, the bullets spattering harmlessly against the buildings as the soldiers fired at him with unsteady aim from the run. He made the second turn ahead of their fire and rounded the third barely in time to escape a shower of steel jacketed lead which spattered the walls behind him.

Upon rounding the ancient stone structure that marked his entrance into Rue Chambron, Elton halted and peered cautiously back. The escort was racing madly toward him and would have him in the open in a few moments. And while Elton knew the lay of Paris, he needed a few extra moments just now in which to orient himself against his final move. He swung his pistol around the corner of the sheltering house and fired deliberately upon the patrol, taking care to aim well over the heads of the men. The infantrymen scattered to the gutters, casting themselves on their bellies in order to escape bullets and steady their aim. Elton used the precious respite in which to catch the lay of the Rue Chambron. Although he had seen it only in the French intelligence photographs furnished by Colonel Ourq, he instantly identified the age worn old stone rookery that was his destination. It stood not thirty paces away, bleak and forbidding, with no sign of life even in the grimy café that occupied a section of the ground floor.

With a final cautioning shot to check his pursuers, he bolted for the place. Fortune seemed to favor him. The street was deserted. Before the first of the infantrymen could come into sight, Elton shot into the open door and rushed wildly through the empty room only to collide violently with a perspiring fat man in a caterer's apron and cap. The fat man, instead of showing fear at the apparition of an armed invader, broke into strident French epithets.

"Hide me out and be quick about it!" the fugitive gasped, flourishing his pistol without leveling it.

To Elton's surprise, the fellow's anger cooled instantly. He looked back at the American collectedly, without surprise or other emotion.

"*Je ne comprends pas anglais,*" he said with an indifferent shrug of his porcine shoulders.

"Quick—*tout de suite!*" Elton commanded.

He pointed to the floor and raised his pistol again in a desperate gesture. At the same moment a fusillade of shots rang out in the Rue Chambron. The Frenchman, as if in sudden understanding of the situation, led Elton into the dingy kitchen of the place, lifted a worn timber door from the floor and motioned Elton down the stone steps into the musty cellar.

"If you tip me off to the American soldiers it'll be finis for you," the fugitive shouted back with a significant toss of his pistol.

The Frenchman let the door fall into place with a noisy bang. The closing of the hole left the cellar as black as Hades, so black that Elton could only grope his way blindly until he came against a wall and stood there in helplessness to await developments. A clatter of hobnails on the wooden floor of the café overhead heralded the arrival of the pursuit detachment in a few moments. He caught the hum of excited voices and vaguely made out that they were demanding his hiding place.

"Open up your basement—or into the American hoosegow you go!"

ELTON heard the stentorian demand clearly and caught the scraping of hobs toward the kitchen. In desperation he struck a match and looked about him for a way of escape from this menace. The light only brought a groan. The cellar was a small affair, securely walled in—a mere hole for the storage of a few barrels of cheap wine. He had brought up at the end of a blind trail, after all his effort at making a plausible approach. In a few moments the infantrymen would search him out and escort him back in failure to face the humiliation of appealing, after all, to headquarters for release.

The soldiers were lifting the heavy trap door overhead when a soft voice spoke close behind him.

"Enter, monsieur," it bade him.

Elton started at the intervention, surprised in spite of his preparations for any developments once he had entered the café on the Rue Chambron. He turned to see a rift in the solid wall, a rift that was revealed by a broad shaft of mellow light in which stood a man. Into this refuge he darted not a moment too soon. Light from overhead was penetrating the hole and he caught the rasp of hobnails on the stone steps leading from the kitchen as the wall behind him closed as suddenly and as noiselessly as it had opened. The light flashed out and he found himself again standing in inky blackness.

Indistinctly he could make out the scurrying about of the searchers in the wine cellar a few feet away. Shortly the sounds died out, the escort evidently having satisfied itself and turned its quest elsewhere. There was no sound now but the pounding of his own heart. Elton's veins ran hot with conflicting emotions. There was a sense of triumph that he had succeeded in the first vital step of his mission. There was the tingling of taut nerves at the realization that he now faced the most desperate spy nest in all Europe. Slowly but surely, while the black room favored him, he imposed his iron will upon himself and collected his faculties against the inevitable developments of the immediate future.

The light snapped on presently and revealed another small, stone lined wall, dark and almost as dismal and uninviting as the wine cellar behind. It was devoid of fixtures except for a table and a single chair at which sat an elderly man, his attire covered by a loose black smock.

"*Que voulez vous, monsieur?*" the fellow inquired in the same easy voice that had invited Elton into the room.

"No compree French!" Elton replied glumly. "Got anybody here that can talk American?"

The other did not reply at once. He sat with his eyes fixed upon Elton, impersonal little eyes, over which the lids drooped in a way that suggested a man of small alertness. Elton looked back, studying the fellow intently, without appearing to do so. A man approaching fifty, spare, angular, with lined face of little character. Probably a mere outer sentinel, a doorkeeper in the underground network beyond, Elton thought. Certainly not one to arouse suspicion by his manner and appearance.

"What brings you here?" the fellow asked in good English at the end of a long interval.

"Dodging twenty-five years in the hoosegow," said Elton bluntly. "I'm sure much obliged to you for helping me slip that American wolf pack."

The interrogator's face underwent not the slightest change. Evidently he was a man who felt no emotion.

"Tell me your whole story in detail," he prompted Elton laconically.

"There's not much of it, my friend," Elton said. "They were sending me to do a quarter of a century for striking an officer. I saw a chance to try a getaway—and here I am."

The other picked up a pencil and very deliberately moved a pad of paper in front of him.

"I want all the details," he persisted. "Everything that's happened from the time you joined the Service right on down to this moment."

Elton, with a show of reluctance, sketched in the life of Strothers. In this he was not forced to improvise. He had studied and rehearsed the rôle of Strothers.

Furthermore, he now clung to what he esteemed to be the mental attitude of Strothers. For the time being he was not Elton, of the American Military Intelligence Service, but the hounded private, victim of iron fisted and unreasoning injustice, chafing with resentment, burning with his wrongs.

In that selfsame spirit he poured out the tale he had fabricated. When he had finished his story his questioner arose without a word, walked to a wall, pressed an unseen spring, or button, and disappeared through a second sliding door in the wall that closed behind him without leaving the slightest trace of its existence.

CHAPTER V

A BARGAIN IS STRUCK

FOR THE better part of an hour Elton was left standing alone in the dark room. Not a sound reached his ears and in time the heavy silence, the gloomy uncertainty, began to tug at his nerves. He remembered suddenly that he had been allowed to keep his pistol. In his pocket he had two extra clips of .45 caliber ammunition with which he filled the half empty magazine of the weapon. The loaded gun gave him a sense of security. He took advantage of the empty room to secrete the weapon in his blouse, handy to his reach. No matter what happened he would not be wholly defenseless, he assured himself.

His eyes fixed themselves in time on the top of the deserted table. He noted with a flicker of interest that it was littered with maps and papers. Across one corner lay a canvas dispatch case, bulging with documents. Another dispatch case was hung across the back of the chair. His interest quickened. A glance at those papers, while the room was empty of observers, might yield invaluable information. It might orient him against his future course, warn him of future dangers. But he discreetly put aside any thought of crossing the room. That sliding door might admit some one at any instant. This was not a time for hasty action. He must play the game slowly, cautiously, with every atom of his intelligence keyed up to the highest pitch, with an iron hand at the control of his feelings at every instant. Suiting action to thought, he lighted a cigaret, seated himself on the stone floor, with his hands resting between his knees, and waited.

When the sliding door finally parted it was to admit a different man. A man of the same height as the one who had admitted Elton, though he was much younger and seemed more alert. The eyes he fixed upon Elton were those of dead carp and his voice, when he spoke, was low, cold and expressionless.

"So you are an American officer?" the man inquired, no hint in his tone of the startling import carried by his words.

Elton had refuge in the rôle of Private Strothers.

"I was a non-com," he replied evenly. "They busted me for no reason at all. That's what started my run of hard luck."

There was an almost imperceptible glint in the dead eyes.

"So you Americans are taking up where the French secret police left off?" He leered at Elton. "Did you fancy you would fool any one?"

"You mean—" Elton's eyes distended at the thrust and a gleam of fear flashed momentarily. He covered instantly. "You mean you're going to turn me over to the police?" he demanded.

His hand rose to his unbuttoned blouse, the tips of his fingers caressing the butt of his Army automatic.

"A clever rogue, on my word," commented the other. "Or else a very valuable acquisition. My intuitions warn me against you—but I'm going to make sure."

Elton glowered back.

"I can't see where anybody ought to cut in," he said. "If you're so afraid I might get you in bad with the Americans, just let me stay here till night and I'll make my getaway. I got my month's pay left—and I'll turn it over, if that'll help any."

"Either you are or you aren't what you seem to be," commented the other coldly. "If you are—excellent for all concerned. If you aren't—" The veriest flicker of a smile passed over the lean face. "In any event I'll establish the facts for myself. You need say nothing more. *Bon jour*, my friend, and in the meantime you will not want for necessary comforts."

He turned on his heel without haste and strolled from the room, the unseen door sliding aside for him as if by magic as he approached. The door closed, then opened at once to admit a fat, dumpy man with an egg shaped bald head who carried an ordinary Army cot and several olive drab American blankets folded under one arm, while with his other hand he held a steaming tray of food. These things he placed in the center of the room and left without so much as a glance at Elton.

Thereafter the minutes lengthened into hours, unendurable hours of tormenting silence. Elton maintained his wakefulness until his wrist watch told the hour of midnight, when he turned in for sleep. When he awakened from a fitful doze it was seven o'clock of the next morning. While he slept his breakfast had been brought in to him, together with a package of cigarets. When he had finished his tepid coffee he took one of his strange host's cigarets.

THE LENGTH and elegance of it attracted his attention, together with a vague and pleasing perfume. It was no ordinary French cigaret, nor was it of American manufacture. He struck a match to light it and under the flame his eye caught a small figure in gold on the side of the cylinder. He took it from his mouth in curiosity and as he did so he started. The figure was a coronet and under it in graceful gold script the letter "V" superimposed upon the letter "S"—Von Strindheim!

There was a slight tremor in Elton's hand as he struck another match. The hand was steady again as he raised the light to his cigaret and puffed at it with seeming tranquillity. His face was a mask as he lay down on the Army cot and smoked luxuriously, but inwardly his pulse was racing feverishly. Von Strindheim's monogrammed cigaret! What whim of vanity, what secret import lay behind the German's action in sending in his own private stock?

Who, unless it was Von Strindheim in the flesh, would resort to such subtlety? He remembered Colonel Ourq's insistence that the baron lived—even though he had been a witness at the Prussian *espion's* execution. And the incident of the monogrammed cigaret was more eloquent of the baron's existence than Ourq's stout, if slightly apologetic, insistence. Certainly, Elton reasoned, a mere masquerader would not indulge in such vanities, in so subtle a warning to a mere suspect that it was the baron with whom he must deal.

Hours of the suffocating silence ticked by, hours in which Elton was assailed by gnawing uncertainties. The fear that he might have been sealed in the room to die for want of air dissolved when he found that the little chamber was ventilated by hidden vents.

There was no doubt, then, that he was being held while his story was investigated. And he found a grain of comfort in the thought that he had made his approach with painstaking thoroughness. His striking of the lieutenant, his trial by court—he alone knew the truth behind these incidents. They would stand the test of investigation. Only the incident of taking refuge in this place would arouse suspicion; but would not that suspicion, he asked himself, be erased when the steps by which he became a prisoner were investigated?

Certainly the spy at Orly would give him a clearance, for it was impossible that the German operative there, masquerading in American uniform, had failed to learn all the details of his rumpus. Doubtless he was an eyewitness of the drubbing administered to the squadron adjutant.

The long hours of wracking inaction and silence turned his mind again to the table with its piles of papers. As he set to pacing the floor, the lure of those papers became almost irresistible. Once he hesitated—all but stopped before the table. But then he remembered that his rôle was that of Private Strothers; and Private Strothers, hounded fugitive, would have small interest in a mere pile of documents.

Promptly at noon, with true German punctiliousness, the dumpy old menial came through the wall with luncheon. Hard on the heels of the flunkey appeared another figure—a slight, erect, faultlessly groomed man of early middle age, in French civilian dress.

"You have fared in some comfort, I

trust?" the fellow greeted Elton in a polite, formal voice.

"Thanks," said Elton. "It's been great to have a safe place to hide out in, away from those wolves. I'm obliged to you gentlemen."

THE NEWCOMER had a chair brought in, seated himself and bade Elton proceed with his luncheon. He sat observing the American in a casual sort of way. From his moment's survey of the man, Elton concluded that he must be a personage of secondary importance, although without doubt one of the Kaiser's trained operatives. His face was that of an upper officer-caste Frenchman, strong, clear features, shrewd gray eyes, small waxed black mustache that heightened the pallor of his pale skin, as of one who has been little in the open with troops. One characteristic caught Elton's attention later. The fellow's heavy arched eyebrows occasionally moved up and down in a way suggestive of a tic or nervous ailment.

"Your story checks out fairly well, my friend," the visitor announced presently.

Elton looked up anxiously.

"Will you tell me what's in the air, what chance I got of a getaway—just where I stand?" he demanded.

"Certainly," said the operative. "We can afford to be very frank with you. First, may I ask if you have regretted your rash action in any way? Has it occurred to you that perhaps you would fare a great deal better by surrendering yourself to the American military police?"

"Never!" Elton spat the word. "I'd rather die than put in a quarter of a century behind the bars! A rotten deal, I got!"

"You are very optimistic, my friend," said the other, "in your assumption that the Americans would hold you in jail. I presume you realize that the new charge against you is one that is dealt with summarily?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are wanted for murder—and you know the penalty for that offense."

"Murder?" Elton was genuinely startled by this play. "I beat up on a lieutenant, but I didn't murder him."

"But you shot two of the soldiers who tried to capture you—killed one outright and a second died later of a pistol wound."

Elton jumped up and paced the floor in simulated agitation. His mind had penetrated the subterfuge instantly. That he had fired well over the heads of his pursuers he was certain. Therefore, the fellow's purpose in charging him with murder was all too clear.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he demanded, returning to his seat and staring resolutely at the *espion*.

"That depends on how well you are willing to pay us for our pains," the other said.

"You can have all I got," pleaded Elton. "It isn't much, but I'll turn it over."

"I wasn't talking in terms of money." The fellow smiled insinuatingly. "I meant in service."

"If there's anything I can do— Tell me what you want."

The German operative lighted a cigaret, an ordinary French cigaret, and subjected Elton to a further contemplative study.

"First, kindly turn over to me your weapon," he directed.

"Why—why is that necessary?" Elton's reluctance in disarming himself was real. The presence of the pistol under his coat was a grim comfort which he hesitated to relinquish.

"If we do not help you, of what value is a pistol, or a hundred pistols, against the vengeance of the American military police?" the spy reasoned shrewdly.

"I reckon that's right too," Elton responded glumly. He drew forth the automatic and gave it over.

"As I said," the Prussian agent proceeded promptly, slipping the pistol into his coat pocket, "we can afford to be very frank with you—under the circumstances. We are not conducting either a charitable institution or a refuge for fugitive Americans. Every one here works and works hard. Your job will be that of a motorcycle courier running between Paris and Belfort—a work of the greatest importance, if you elect to undertake it."

"But how am I going to run around out in the open, with them after me for murder?" Elton demanded.

"That has been thought of, my friend. The Americans, thanks to our efforts, believe you were drowned the other day while trying to swim down the Seine. No one looks for a dead man. With very slight disguise, and with an American uniform and M. P. brassard on your arm, the dumb Americans would not stop you in a hundred years. I might add that you will be richly paid for your services; you will have the cooperation and aid of an extensive organization, and a future after the war, which is going to end some time during July, following our capture of Paris."

"You mean for me to—to carry spy messages? Is that what you're driving at?" Elton was on his feet again and staring wildly at his host.

"IN THE service of his Imperial Majesty, the King of Prussia," said the other in an even collected voice. He arose and turned away, pausing at the secret door as it opened for him. "A much safer occupation than dodging murder charges," he added. "You may think it over and give me your answer at your convenience. Unless you wish to enter upon your work in the proper spirit, we have no desire to force you. It's entirely up to you."

Elton's voice halted him as he was passing out of the room.

"I'll tell you now," he said in a low vibrant voice. "I'm wise enough to see there's nothing else I can do. I got myself to think about and—while I never thought much of the Kaiser's gang—I can't see where I got any more call to love a gang that hasn't got anything better for me than a—a rope."

"I had counted upon your intelligence," smiled the *espion*. He consulted his watch and his eyebrows twitched nervously. "It is nearly one o'clock. We will discuss the further details of your work a bit later. For the present I am occupied with another matter—of small importance. It is possible that I will let you observe the details, as your first lesson. It may establish your faith in the exceptional intellect under whose guidance you will operate hereafter."

"You mean—the Kaiser?" Elton asked.

"I mean his Excellency, the Hauptmann Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim," responded the other. He turned to the wall and a moment later the massive sliding door closed upon him.

CHAPTER VI

THE APACHE FAILURE

WHILE the visitor had taken away the comfort afforded by an automatic pistol, he left Elton the solace of a morning paper with which to relieve the monotony of the wait. Elton turned to the newspaper eagerly, not that he was in any humor for reading, but because it gave him an appearance of occupation while he analyzed the developments of the day and reckoned his future course. A courier to the Swiss border! A remarkable stroke of luck, he thought. It would give him the routes of the important German intelligence reports. It would give him a chance at their ciphers and codes. It might give him his opportunity to trap the great spy nest of which he was now about to become a part.

When he had made his conclusions, he turned his mind to the printed columns. Although he read French with difficulty, he was able to glean the news of the day. Battle news. A résumé of the economic situation in France. Lists of officer casualties. A not too cheerful estimate of American strength and participation that could be depended upon during 1918. Hints of an impending German drive, described as the most powerful the Central Powers had yet launched. Near the bottom of a column devoted to editorial comment he came upon an article by the editor which he read with a growing amazement. He read it a second and third time in the thought that perhaps his translation had been faulty.

Under the startling caption, "Shall we let the World Bleed to Death?" the editor demanded whether the slaughter must go on until civilization had destroyed itself? Was there not some way out, some honorable way in which the French leaders could initiate negotiations? Or must the red orgy go on and on until there was black crape dangling from every door in France!

He turned to the front page again and glanced at the heading. *Le Journal*, a powerful newspaper of Paris, often spoken of as the mouthpiece of the French masses. What could it mean? Elton remembered that French morale had been low for months, but did this mean that it was breaking? A daring editorial of far reaching consequences, and if it reflected an existing weakness in France, or crystallized such a weakness in the popular mind, would France be able to survive a smashing German drive on Paris such as had been hovering in the north, like an ominous black specter?

* * *

HIS REFLECTIONS were interrupted by a voice. He looked up to see still another man, a slightly older man than the preceding visitor, but of like build with the exception of the shoulders, which sloped almost to the point of deformity. The face struck him with the force of a blow, a sinister face, warped in feature, cold, merciless, cruel. Its lines were sharp lines—a black bristling brow that covered eyes which glinted through mere slits. The nose was long, sharp and twisted at the bridge; the mouth an abrupt blue lipped line that broke sharply downward at the corners.

"I am directed, monsieur, to request your presence in another room," he announced in a voice that was as hard and metallic as his face. "We are preparing to receive a distinguished visitor in this chamber."

Elton followed him without reply through the secret door and found himself in a narrow stone hallway, as barren and bleak as the chamber in which he had been held on probation. They proceeded a short distance along the hallway until its wall opened to admit them through another secret door into a small room. As he entered Elton saw that it was more than an underground hole. The floor was carpeted, there were several comfortable chairs, a large writing desk of Circassian walnut, and the place seemed well ventilated, although no vents were visible. From the ceiling was suspended a long cylindrical tube, the size of a stovepipe, which broke four feet above the floor into a square projection, and which Elton immediately recognized as a periscope, or trench-scope of special construction.

"We are about to receive a distinguished visitor," the German said, speaking the same excellent English as his predecessors.

"One of our own workers, you mean?" Elton inquired.

"No, a French person," the other answered. "He arrived some hours before in the excellent café of Monsier Du Puy, above us, which you have such good cause to remember. Even now he is in monsieur's unpleasant wine cellar, his heart filled with vengeance against the French secret police, ready to join forces with us."

"Are you sure you—we—can trust him?" Elton demanded. He registered dire alarm. "Mighn't he be somebody the Americans are sending down here on my trail?"

"He is Pierre Dubonnet, a French Apache, who has escaped the conscription and has a price on his head for a series of villainous murders, my friend. His story is most plausible—and we can trust him implicitly." The fellow smiled cynically. "We can always trust French stupidity in matters of this kind. Especially when we know the man's real name and mission days before he comes to us."

"You're talking over my head," Elton persisted. "You mean he isn't Pierre, an Apache, with a knife out for his own people?"

"I mean that he is really the Lieutenant Paul Marie d'Estainnez, agent No. 42, of the French department of military intelligence, sent here by Colonel Ourq to outwit the Imperial German military intelligence service. You shall observe presently how well he succeeds, clever and painstaking rogue though he is."

A faint buzzing, barely audible, sounded in the room. The German agent drew his chair close to the periscope and fixed his eyes to the mirrored aperture at its base. For some moments he gazed in silence, then sat back and motioned Elton to move his chair up and observe.

"Our Frenchman is arriving this moment," he said. "Make haste if you wish to see the spectacle in its entirety."

THE CHAMBER from which he had so recently departed was as clear to Elton through the 'scope as if he had been looking in through a clear window. The Frenchman was inside now, the secret door closing behind him, the pudgy little German attendant motioning him to a chair. The German menial, whose functions Elton now guessed to be that of manipulator of the secret doors and flunkey of all work, retired from the room at once, reappeared a moment later with a bottle of wine and withdrew a second time, leaving the Frenchman alone.

The French operative was effectively disguised as an Apache. He, too, must have resorted to time and pains in preparation for the desperate adventure. On his face was a stubbly, week's growth of hair. His face was grimy, his eyes dissipated and bloodshot, his clothes little better than filthy rags. His black hair was tangled and matted under a greasy cap. Elton saw that the courageous French agent had not depended upon paint or makeup, but must have lived among the Apaches as a background for his invasion of the secret German haunts.

There followed a long period in which the Frenchman merely sat in the room alone. He carried out his rôle as an Apache with the skill of an actor, looking about him with furtive, ratlike glances, scratching himself frequently and vigorously, in the manner of one who is vermin infested, and smoking one black French cigaret after another. Elton felt pity for the man as he sat looking at him. Betrayed before his arrival . . . without the slightest chance of escape from that stone hole, doomed to certain death, the mysterious death that already had claimed, one by one, those fifty of his comrades who had preceded him in the mad venture.

Again Elton thanked his own prudence in having left Colonel Ourq in darkness of his plans, for there could be no doubt now of one thing. The Germans had representation in the French secret service. Small wonder the flower of the French military operatives had failed to return from the chase.

"You need not wear out your eyes uselessly," the German interrupted him after a time. "Other eyes will warn us when there is anything of interest for us to observe."

"You are going to kill him?" Elton asked bluntly. His voice was hollow and strained in spite of his effort at sangfroid.

"On the contrary," said the other, "his Excellency would not permit such a thing as that. It would be so—so unnecessary."

"But didn't you say he was a French secret service spy—come here to get us? Do you let that kind go when you catch them?"

The German's thin blue lips curled over stained teeth.

"It is much simpler," he said, "to give them the rope and let them hang themselves in their own way. It is a more fitting reward for treachery, as you shall see very clearly in so short a time."

They sat in silence a long time. The German nonchalantly lighted a large, elaborately carved briar pipe and buried himself in a book, leaving Elton to his own devices and thoughts. There were other books on the table but Elton refrained from taking one. Interest in a book at such a time would not fit in with the rôle of Private Strothers. He sat slumped in his chair, his heart depressed and heavy at the tragic fate he was certain awaited his helpless ally in the other room, a fate that might have been his except for his prudence in guarding against betrayal. As he waited he smoked one cigaret after another, not as a gesture, but to relieve the tension of his nerves.

The buzzer rang again, a faint burring sound, but now having the venomous malignance of a coiled rattler's warning. Elton started. The German operative laid his book aside with an indolent movement, moved his chair back to the periscope and motioned Elton up again.

THE FRENCHMAN, Elton saw, was now pacing the floor restlessly. His gait no longer was the slinking movement of an Apache renegade, but the stride of a soldier. His head was up and his eyes were fixed upon the table as he walked, the table whose top was littered with papers and dispatch cases. Each time he approached the table he paused to look about the chamber with alert, searching eyes, to convince himself that he was not observed.

A guttural exclamation came from the German, an inarticulate sound of abiding satisfaction as the Frenchman stood furtively over the table.

"The dunce," he said. "In another moment he shall usher himself into hell by his own treacherous hands."

As the Frenchman reached down to the papers on the table, Elton was swept by an impulse to cry out in warning. He felt that the Frenchman's move would prove the signal for whatever dire reprisal the Kaiser's agents intended for the doomed operative. But as the officer ran deftly through the papers, nothing happened. He paused at a large sheet of paper and read it with eyes that became distended. Whatever information he got from the document encouraged him to continue his search avidly, and yet with a trained operative's care.

When he had finished his examination of the papers on the table, the Frenchman gingerly took up the dispatch cases, one by one, and with his eye alternating between the secret door and the papers, began going over them one at a time.

"It is over, my friend," the German announced laconically. "There is nothing more of interest."

Elton saw with astonishment that the German had moved back from the 'scope and was buried in his book. The fellow glanced up as he felt Elton's eyes upon him and spoke casually, without emotion.

"I would not turn away, my friend," he said. "Perhaps what is yet to come might amuse you—though to me such sights have become commonplace and distasteful." He suppressed a yawn as he returned to his book.

His eyes glued back to the periscope, Elton saw that the strange scene was unchanged, except that the Frenchman had drawn his revolver and held it under the crook of his left arm, ready for the grip of his right hand in event of surprise. He continued to explore the dispatch cases, document by document, with a quickening of interest, a relaxation of his alertness, evidently convinced that the information he gleaned was worth the risk of his life, was more urgently valuable than the spy nest itself.

Why was he permitted to continue his exploration? Elton asked himself. Were the Germans merely toying with him as a cat plays with a helpless mouse? Would an unseen hand finally send a bullet crashing into the Frenchman's heart, or spring a hidden trap to plunge him into an underground cavern?

Even as Elton asked himself these questions, his nerves on edge, sickened by his own utter helplessness to intervene, the answer began to unfold itself. The Frenchman paused, a sheet of paper in his hand, and looked about the room in the startled way of a wild animal that has sensed danger. In another instant he had cast the document aside and retreated across the room, a look of terror mounting to his face.

Whatever omen had reached his mind confirmed itself swiftly. He began moving around the chamber frantically, examining the walls for a rift in the trap. But, unlike a trapped animal, when he found there was no hope of escape, he pulled himself together and calmly returned to the table, there to seat himself and resume the reading of the German papers.

The labored heaving of the French officer's chest, the greenish pallor that spread over his features in the passage of a minute, betrayed to Elton the tragedy that was being enacted before his eyes. It was gas in a now airtight chamber that was sapping the victim's life. Gas from unseen jets that the Frenchman himself had opened by the very act of lifting a dispatch case. His own official curiosity had been the means of his wretched end.

WITH magnificent courage the Frenchman awaited death. Now that the trap was disclosed to him he must have sensed that relentless enemy eyes observed his cruel ordeal. His face became placid, undisturbed, unafraid; the face of a brave man meeting a firing squad in the line of duty. His head nodded.

The gas was robbing him slowly of consciousness. Very shortly he would pass into the sleep from which there would be no awakening. As he nodded a second time and a third, he shook himself, fought off the icy fingers of death that were clutching his throat, and got to his feet. Painfully, he forced his swaying body into the stiff erectness of a soldier at attention and raised his hand to the vizor of his grimy Apache cap in salute.

"*Vive la France!*"

Elton choked back a sob and closed his eyes, not daring at the moment to expose his face lest his emotion betray him to the German agent's gaze. When he could trust himself he moved back his chair.

"It is over," he said, his voice low and unnatural. A word of tribute to the gallant Frenchman rose to his lips. "He died like a man—magnificently!"

"They usually do," responded the *espion* placidly. He laid his book aside and sat up in his chair. "But no more magnificently than our own Von Strindheim died under the blade of their guillotine."

"But I thought—" even the tragedy was swept aside for the moment by this amazing statement—"I thought you said it was the baron—Von Strindheim—who is—is the one we look to for orders?" Elton stammered.

"Quite right, my friend," responded the German enigmatically. "His Excellency's one difficulty is to convince the French that he lives today, and quite a load it is upon their credence, since they saw his head fall into their basket."

"But you said he died magnificently!"

"Indeed, yes. It was sublime, incomparable, the end of a true Prussian. Except, of course, that the heads of really capable gentlemen do not really fall into any one's basket. And now that the ruse has served its purpose, his Excellency finds it stupid to be thought dead, a game too one sided for his liking. He feels that such security might dull the edges of his intellect if permitted to continue. You will understand these things the more clearly when you have observed the hauptmann baron with your own eyes."

"Then the baron really is here—and I am to see him for myself?"

"Frequently, no doubt. Since you are entering our service, the baron will want to observe you in many ways of his own choosing. It will remain for you to identify him for yourself when he is present. But in the meantime I am instructed to present you to the Lieutenant Von Hintzen, the chief of staff to his Excellency, who is to set you about your duties at once."

CHAPTER VII

TO THE FRONTIER . . .

AT THE end of a network of dark walled-in hallways, Elton was left standing alone while his escort disappeared through another sliding door. His wait was very brief this time. The wall opened, a voice bade him enter and he found himself facing still another operative, alone, in a large room of stone, but luxuriously furnished.

The man sat at a large desk of elaborately carved teak in an immense Oriental chair of the same material. He motioned Elton to a chair and sat without speaking until the fat man-of-all-work appeared from nowhere, bearing a silver champagne bucket with a bottle of select wine packed in ice. Elton saw that he now dealt with a personage, a quite different sort from the ones who had previously engaged him, although, oddly enough, he was of the same slight build and his physique was that of the others, except for square, well set shoulders. His face was keen, aquiline, and with an unmistakable arrogance in the set of the finely molded mouth and the half closed, indolent eyes.

"You have been told of me," he said, his voice mellow, friendly but self-contained. "Von Hintzen, the one who looks after details here for his Excellency the Hauptmann Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim. You are the American who is willing to serve us as courier between Paris and Belfort. On reflection do you find your situation to your liking?"

"Why not?" responded Elton with a shrug of hopelessness. "I am not in very good shape to pick my work. This is the only thing that gives me anything to look to, except a few feet of American hemp, with a scaffold on one end and me on the other.

"Neatly said!" exclaimed Von Hintzen, a whimsical smile flitting across his passive face. There was an indefinable insinuation in his voice as he added, "You may be assured that his Excellency will see to it that you are appropriately rewarded for your efforts, regardless of what reward your operations shall merit!"

He opened the champagne with his own hand and filled two glasses, passing one to Elton.

"A bit of wine after your observations this afternoon, which must have been rather unpleasant," he proposed. "And since we drink—a toast! To his Imperial Majesty, Wilhelm, King of Prussia!" Von Hintzen stood at this and drank, snapping the shank of his glass as he drained it.

Elton followed his example. Von Hintzen puzzled him. The succeeding line of interrogators puzzled him, each with his exact knowledge of what had transpired before. The enigma of Von Hintzen was heightened by the magnificence of the room in which he was quartered, the full richness of its appointments catching Elton's eye as he looked boldly about him.

It must have been thirty feet in length and perhaps twenty-four feet across. On the stone floor was a rich Persian rug of the finest weave. Tapestries worth a small fortune hung from the walls, while the chairs and trappings were suitable for an imperial lounge. There was in the air, instead of the damp smell of stone, a faint pleasing odor of a rare incense that burned from unseen lamps.

One curious detail that attracted him was the array of flowers. Flowers of various species literally flooded the room. There were beautiful glass and silver vases of them on the desk, on small tables over the room; flowers festooned along the walls, arranged on the floor. Strangely, they were not of the choicest. A few bunches of roses were outnumbered by large arrays of ordinary daisies, common dog fennel, poppies—flowers of the French fields.

EVEN as Elton was wondering at Von Hintzen's queer penchant, the menial came through the door bearing a pasteboard box which he delivered to the Prussian. Von Hintzen opened the parcel—a large bouquet of fennel—upon which his eyes beamed with satisfaction as he arranged it carefully in a silver bowl on his desk. Except for the flowers, a gold inkwell, pen, pencils and a small pad of paper, the top of the desk was bare. No papers, no documents, no maps appeared.

"You were impressed, my friend," Von Hintzen proceeded, "with the—ah—most unfortunate death of the gallant Frenchman a few moments ago. In fact I might say your sympathies were deeply stirred."

"I never saw a man die quite like that," Elton parried. "It upset me a bit, for sure. I didn't think the French were quite—quite like that."

"You might have felt differently," said Von Hintzen, "had you seen the French blade descend upon the head of a gallant German soldier not so long ago." There was both pride and bitterness in the German's voice. "Think of the sublime courage of an ordinary fellow, a mere common under officer of the Prussian Guards, who laughs at the French kiss of death, as they call their wretched guillotine; who dies like a rat to fill a nameless grave—in the service of the Fatherland!"

"I was just told it was the baron himself who was sentenced to the knife," Elton ventured, intent on learning at last the evasive details of Von Strindheim's mysterious escape.

Von Hintzen sneered.

"The stupid French intelligence was certain of it. They lacked the imagination, the thoroughness to suspect the truth; nor are they capable of believing it now with the evidence before their eyes. In reality the man whose life they took was Feldwebel Hans Schwarz, a man of his Excellency's former regiment, a man devotedly attached to the Hauptmann Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim, and who bore only a passing resemblance to the baron. Yet how they prated and strutted over their feat of trapping his Excellency."

The lieutenant lighted a brown panatella cigar and puffed reflectively, his eyes half closed. But Elton saw that the eyes under the drooping lids burned with a covert alertness that observed every movement of his American hostage's eyes and face.

"I do not hesitate to tell you all," the officer went on. "German thoroughness foresees events by many years. A gentleman of his Excellency's talent leaves little to chance. Since he foresaw that one day the French intelligence service would want the baron in their clutches, he established the Feldwebel in that rôle while he worked on unknown. You can see, my friend, what happened. They merely arrested the man they knew as his Excellency, tried him, executed him and congratulated themselves upon their cleverness. Yet the fine part of it all, as I have said, was the magnificence in which the Feldwebel sacrificed himself. But his grave shall not be nameless. Already his Imperial Majesty has conferred upon Feldwebel Schwarz the order of the Iron Cross—and at the proper time, a bronze memorial shall be placed in Köln to the brave fellow's memory. I cite these facts merely that you may realize the cleverness and the courage of the Prussian arms—the immutable fact that we are destined to triumph!"

As he heard the mystery of Von Strindheim's reappearance on earth thus explained Elton controlled his surprise, clinging to the thought of his rôle, to the mental attitude of Private Strothers, lest those boring eyes penetrate his sham. He offered no comment and the Prussian did not invite his opinion.

"But I have a mission for you—" The lieutenant changed the subject. "I am sending you immediately to Belfort on a journey, one of sentiment which involves no risk. Are you prepared to assume your duties immediately?"

"Is there not the risk that I will be picked up by the American military police the minute I show myself?" Elton asked, shifting nervously in his chair.

"A risk, to be certain," said Von Hintzen abruptly. He added with a disagreeable emphasis, "But hardly any such risk as that taken by the gallant Frenchman whom you admired so deeply—nor by our own Feldwebel Schwarz. In fact you will face little risk at all, although it is not possible, my friend, to have a part in a great war without taking some chances. We'll furnish you with a most effective disguise and you will have the support of his Excellency at every turn."

"Well, I'm not afraid of a little risk," retorted Elton. "But I never tried a disguise. It always seemed to me like a disguise was sure to attract more people than it would fool."

"A clumsy disguise, yes. But we will send you in the uniform of a military police lieutenant of the American Army. The M. P. brassard will take you past the American and French barriers without the least question—thanks to their stupid inefficiency."

"I'm ready then," Elton asserted. "But I do wish there was something I could do besides spy work."

Von Hintzen's thin mouth stiffened.

"I do not like that term!" he snapped. "You are working for an important and highly honorable branch of the military service, as a part of the most useful body in France. Spy is a poor word, one I detest. Besides, on your first trip, I am requiring you to do nothing more than deliver some flowers to a lady in Belfort who is ill—a very dear friend of his Excellency."

"Well, you got my word that I'll go through—and that stands," Elton affirmed.

"One last word." The officer leaned across the table and spoke through compressed lips. "If you attempt treachery—Well, you have seen what happens! His Excellency has the resources to follow you to the ends of the earth. Treachery will never be forgiven any man this side of hell. I do not mind telling you that his Excellency is suspicious of you. His intuitions warn him to have nothing to do with you. But—a misfortune in the Vosges Mountains closed our communications there a short time since—and we need the services of an American courier to Belfort."

The fellow sat back in his chair and relaxed. He regarded Elton for a time with a hint of ironical amusement.

"If you will pardon my frankness," he said, "his Excellency insists that you are an exceptionally clever rogue, here for no good purpose. There are two reasons why we are discounting the Hauptmann Baron Erich's thought. First, we run no risk, since you are the one who will suffer in event of treachery. Second, his Excellency admits he may be mistaken since you are an—an American—and, therefore, not one to cause us much concern in event of treachery. Americans, understand me, are not stupid folks—merely primitive, and rather simple."

"I'm going to do my best to make good on the job," Elton averred, the other's subtle affront to his nationality seeming to be lost upon him.

"In event you win his Excellency's favor," said Von Hintzen, "you will be an exceedingly fortunate and favored man. But come—it is time that you must be on your way to Belfort."

VON HINTZEN himself supervised Elton's departure on his initial mission in the Emperor's service. First he fitted him with an olive drab uniform of approved weave and cut, the coat of fine serge, the breeches of Bedford cord, Cordovan puttees and Sam Browne belt, cap of latest American design, collar ornaments, an M. P. arm brassard, every detail complete. The Prussian, with a few deft touches of razor and pencil, changed the shape of Elton's eyebrows and with clippers he close cropped his shock of blond hair.

"Odd as it may seem," the German commented as he surveyed his handiwork, "you could pass through your own company without being recognized." The secret of a disguise is to use skill in the details and make it very simple. A change of posture serves much better than four feet of false hair. You must remember to stand very straight and keep your shoulders well back, which is not your natural way of standing."

Disguise completed, Von Hintzen initiated his new secret courier into the mystery of entering and leaving the underground rendezvous. Elton's amazement grew as he saw the intricate underground devices that hemmed in German espionage. Years of guarded work by trusted workmen, before the war storm broke, must have gone into the development of this spy nest from which the resourceful baron directed his minions. An impregnable fortress of steel would have been far less secure against French assault. Although he was admitted for the present into the secrets of but one means of egress, Elton saw clearly the impossibility of taking the trap by force—at least without allowing its denizens ample time in which to escape to another prepared rendezvous.

After traversing a network of walled-in corridors with innumerable twists and sharp turns, Von Hintzen led the way through a sliding trap in the floor to a second underground labyrinth, set some twenty feet below the first. A tangled network of halls ended in a gloomy bare chamber some twenty feet square, in which there was no indication of door or window.

This, the Prussian tersely explained, was the point of departure and entrance which Elton would use. On leaving the room he would find himself in a subway station. He would board the train for Avenue de la Montrez, get off at that stop, make his presence known to a taxi driver whose vehicle would be waiting for him in the street, and proceed to the point where a sidecar motorcycle would be waiting. Von Hintzen gave him minute instructions on the route to be followed in traveling to Belfort, his movements upon arrival there, the secret means of regaining admittance to the rendezvous when he returned.

"And now, my friend, you will deliver these flowers to Mlle. Dupre, at number 1214 of the Rue Aignan," said Von Hintzen. He handed Elton a large bouquet of ordinary dog fennel, the stems bound together with wire. "His Excellency sends no dispatches, merely this token of his solicitation for mademoiselle's good health. You will carry them in your musette bag."

"It is only fair for me to know," said Elton, "if they carry hidden papers? In event I am stopped—"

"Have no uneasiness on account of the flowers, my friend," Von Hintzen reassured him. "It would not matter in the least to us if they fell into the hands of the French secret service. Nor will you be called upon to carry secret documents back with you when you return from Belfort, although if mademoiselle should send some token to his Excellency, deliver it into my hands and no other. And now, adieu, Herr Strothers, and *bon voyage*."

Without further ado the Prussian escorted Elton to a corner of the chamber, placed him close against the wall and then disappeared back into the secret labyrinth. A small opening appeared in the wall, its mechanism controlled from overhead by a lookout who saw when the coast was clear. Elton found himself delivered into an obscure corner of a Parisian subway station. A gendarme stood nearby but paid no attention to the American upon whose arm appeared the unquestioned passport of an M. P. brassard. Something about the gendarme stirred Elton, but he put it down to nervousness and hurried into the crowd to await his train.

It was a tedious ride in the stuffy, slow moving French subway to Avenue de la Montrez, where he got out. He caught his breath at sight of the identical gendarme leaving the car immediately ahead of him, but the officer disappeared in the crowd without a glance in Elton's direction; and while he put the circumstance down to coincidence, nevertheless Elton proceeded by a circuitous route to the awaiting taxicab. The driver acknowledged the secret sign of recognition—a covert movement of the hands—admitted Elton to the cab and drove off at high speed, turning and weaving in and out among obscure, narrow streets for more than an hour before he brought up in an alleyway in the outskirts of the city, where an Army motorcycle with sidecar awaited.

CHAPTER VIII

FENNEL AND PHOTOS

THE SUN was low in the west as Elton sped through the suburbs of Paris and flashed into the smooth country road that led through Provins and on in the direction of Belfort. The rush of the balmy June air in his face stimulated his jaded mind after the long confinement in the stuffy underworld of Paris. When he was well past Provins he slowed down the better to reflect upon the developments, upon the hidden purpose that was behind his present mission to the French border city.

Even though he had penetrated the Prussian spy nest in Paris, had even been accepted as a secret courier, what hope offered itself that he would be able to capture Von Strindheim and his spy clan? A feeling akin to despair gripped him as he reflected upon the difficulty that beset his course. The mystery of the spy chieftain's underground citadel and of Von Strindheim's escape from the guillotine had dissolved into simple explanation. But he had seen piled up the evidence of Von Strindheim's resourcefulness, the devilish ingenuity in which the Prussian entrenched himself in the very heart of Paris. Even if he brought a whole French sapper regiment to bear on the place, surrounding it with armed men and tunneling into its underground network, his coup would avail him nothing better than an empty trap. And as for ensnaring the brains of the crew, Von Strindheim himself—Elton remembered that he had not been permitted so much as a fleeting glimpse at the rascal, nor the slightest clew to his habits of coming and going.

If he had hope that the flowers which he carried to Belfort might yield some light, Elton found himself baffled again when he halted in a deserted hedge along the highway and examined the bouquet. Much to his surprise he found there was no secret message concealed in flowers or stems. Why, he demanded of himself at this disclosure, was he rushing across the face of France carrying a bunch of stale dog fennel? Had the baron sent roses, it might have hinted at amour; surely dog fennel was an odd medium by which to express tender sentiments to a lady. It must be, he concluded finally, that this journey was a test, a part of his probation, perhaps a stall for time while his antecedents were more closely investigated by the baron. For the present, then, there was nothing to do but follow his instructions faithfully and await the budding of future developments.

Belfort, and his brief visit to the château of Mlle. Dupre in the environs of the border city, merely added depth to the enigma of his present journey. It was shortly after midnight when he ferreted out the château, an elegant country estate two kilometers from the city, in the direction of the Swiss frontier. There were no lights showing in the place, but his arrival must have been expected since a cow faced domestic responded promptly to his knock and after acknowledging the Von Strindheim pass-sign, escorted him into a bed chamber on the floor above and to the rear of the imposing residence. There he found a gray haired woman, pale, wasted and seemingly very ill, who might have been of either French or German lineage, though he guessed she came from that racial blend common to the region of Alsace-Lorraine.

"I am instructed," said Elton without formality, "to deliver to Mlle. Dupre these flowers sent from Paris by a devoted friend."

"I am Mlle. Dupre," said the woman in a low, weak voice, taking the flowers, her eyes lighting upon them as if they had been orchids. "I am very grateful for them." She looked at them caressingly for a moment and laid them beside her pillow. "And when does monsieur return to Paris?" she inquired.

"Immediately, mademoiselle," said Elton. "Such are my instructions—to report back by sixteen of the clock, which means I have little time to lose."

"Will you be so generous as to deliver this photograph?" she asked. From under her pillow she drew a large mounted picture of a group of soldiers. "I am very grateful to you," she added. "May the Lord protect you and deliver you safely back in Paris. This poor token may prove a great solace to his Excellency. *Bon voyage, monsieur.*"

OUT ON the highway again, Elton rode like the wind. The photograph stung him with impatience, impatience to examine its details; yet caution prompted him to put Belfort far behind him before pausing to look at the picture. That it held the secret of his journey to Belfort seemed next to certain—a message of some sort from Imperial headquarters to the baron at Paris, sent through the medium of the invalid's château which, probably, was nothing more than a relay station in the chain of spy communications.

He risked passing the French barrier some ten kilometers out of Belfort, and the American barrier at Vesoul, with the photograph lying face downward in the bottom of his sidecar attachment. That was safer, he reasoned, than secreting it about his person. If it was found he could claim that he picked it up along the roadside. But neither the French nor American sentinels detained him for more than a moment, passing him at sight of the magical M. P. insignia at his sleeve. In a narrow, hedge lined country lane, he turned off to park his motorcycle in a thicket and thrust the photo under the powerful rays of his headlight.

The picture disclosed no more than had the pungent bouquet of dog fennel. Study it as he might, it revealed nothing. It was a group of British soldiers, arranged in double rank and standing at ease in lax military formation. An arrow penned at the top of the picture pointed downward to one of the soldiers, a scrawny fellow who looked directly into the lens of the camera. A circle of ink framed the soldier's head and underneath was scrawled in English the legend: "Our beloved nephew". On the reverse side there were no markings, no slightest hint of pen dipped in invisible ink. At the end of a puzzled examination of every detail of the photo, Elton could only conclude that the picture was as meaningless, or as inscrutable, as the flowers he had carried to Mlle. Dupre.

But Lieutenant Von Hintzen's eyes quickened into a glow of satisfaction when he received the photograph from Elton's hand that afternoon. At the hour of four, the precise time set for Elton's readmittance to the underground labyrinth of Von Strindheim, the lieutenant himself was at the entrance chamber to receive the American courier. The lieutenant neglected formality of any sort as his eye fell upon the picture under Elton's arm, and he fairly snatched it away, his eyes dancing hungrily as he drank in its detail. Elton saw now that it was no innocent photograph he had brought from the château of Mlle. Dupre.

"You have done very well," the Prussian commented. "I trust you encountered no difficulty with the military barriers along the highway." He added with a slightly disagreeable smile, "Americans are judged so primitive no one suspects them, and as for suspicion of their own kind, they are too simple. What a shame they have been lured into this war on the side of the stupid Allies. They shall learn their horrible error only when it is too late to turn back."

The lieutenant paused to take a cigaret from his jeweled gold case, light it and proffer one to Elton.

"I might say," he added, his eyes upon the courier through a cloud of gray smoke, "that his Excellency is pleased with your trip to Belfort, although I warn you that he has not put aside his suspicion of you. Tomorrow you go again to the frontier, and in the meantime you are free to rest. I will escort you to your quarters where your wants will be amply cared for."

Elton's quarters proved to be a comfortable chamber, although without visible door or window. When the secret door closed upon him he found himself as hopelessly imprisoned as if he had been confined to the money vault of a great bank. The room was lighted with a single incandescent and fresh air was pumped in through hidden vents. A bed, an easy lounging chair, French newspapers and several novels in English offered him their comforts.

While he pretended to relax in the pages of a newspaper, his mind was active with the incident of the photograph. Von Hintzen's reaction to the picture, the Prussian's loss of his customary sangfroid at sight of the photo, revealed with certainty that it was a document of importance, even though any hint of its import had escaped Elton's keen eyes. Another circumstance had caught his eye—the behavior of Von Hintzen's eyebrows when he received Elton. His brows had moved rapidly up and down, a recurrence of the nervous twitch that had afflicted the German agent who had staged the French officer's tragic death. Inconsequential as that might seem, he listed it carefully in his mind for future reference and observation. A third circumstance had escaped him until this moment. As he lighted the cigaret Von Hintzen had given him his eyes caught a familiar mark. On its wrapping was stamped a coronet and underneath, the significant script letters: "VS". Another cigaret from the private stock of Von Strindheim.

IT WAS not until the Prussian was ready for Elton to leave for Belfort the next afternoon that he was permitted to leave the sealed chamber to which his meals had been brought him as usual, by the dumpy guardian of the secret doors. He had used the weary hours of confinement for a minute analysis of every incident and circumstance of his underworld adventure. That process cheered him little, for it gave him small hope of an early success to his intricate mission. At present his best deductions were little more than suspicions, he admitted to himself. And out of it there loomed the gloomy shadow of possible failure, of being effectually outwitted by the wily Von Strindheim, of being used as a courier the while his quarry laughed at him from cover, ready to spring the death trap at the very first suspicion of treachery.

Von Hintzen again escorted him to the outer chamber. The Prussian appeared in high spirits. He inquired solicitously after Elton's comfort, and though Elton listened acutely for the slightest hint of mockery in the other's voice he could only conclude that the Prussian's politeness was genuine. He seized the opportunity, for which he had been waiting, to ask the return of his pistol.

"Ah, my friend," said Von Hintzen, "but a pistol is such a feeble weapon. It is so much more secure to depend upon one's wits and, besides, his Excellency is opposed to violence of any kind. It is so—ah—messy and needless."

"A good automatic might spell the difference between reaching Belfort, or not reaching it," Elton persisted stoutly. "Or I might conceivably be trailed to this very place by the secret service."

The Prussian laughed.

"A pistol can not cope with an army," he replied. "If you shoot while on the highway you are lost. As for a weapon here—it is so unnecessary. I will show you."

He stepped to a corner of the room and pressed a hidden spring in the wall which precipitated a section of the floor violently downward.

"Even if the secret service should batter their way inside," he explained, "they would merely find themselves plunged into the great sewer under Paris, to make their way to the Seine as best they might. Or if they escaped that, what then? There are ample chambers in which they would find themselves secured, from which they would never reappear."

"But if they kept out of the secret rooms?" Elton said.

Again the lieutenant laughed.

"There is no chamber nor space in his Excellency's establishment that is not a death chamber, if need be, for treacherous hands. And they would die without his Excellency's intervention for, as you have seen, his Excellency is a gentleman of great heart as well as great mind, who requires that those who must die do so by their own hand. But precious time passes, Herr Strothers. We have important duties to occupy our time."

If he had expected to receive secret documents on his second trip to Belford, Elton was deeply puzzled when the lieutenant handed him nothing more than a second cluster of dog fennel.

"As I have explained," said Von Hintzen, noting the courier's surprise, "his Excellency is a kindly man and so long as mademoiselle is ill at Belfort he will have her always in his thoughts. The instructions are precisely the same as those you received before—and pray do not risk yourself needlessly in delivering them. *Bon jour*, Herr Strothers. Do not risk yourself to no purpose."

The same heavy jowled French taxi driver awaited him when Elton left the subway train at Avenue de la Montrez. Half an hour later he was whirling like mad out of Paris, through Provins, driven by a consuming impatience to find a safe place in which to reckon with the mystery that he was now certain lurked in that knot of dog fennel. There was no longer any doubt that the flowers conveyed some secret information into Germany. That secret he must discover without further delay.

HE CURSED his stupidity of the day before, when he put the baron's bouquet to a second search. Almost immediately he detected a token that was unmistakable in its significance—a very slight clipping of the ends of the petals. With this discovery he took up a study of each flower, taking pains not to disturb the arrangement of the cluster, nor to detach a single petal.

This search yielded a further illuminating discovery. The petals had been pared in different lengths, ranging from the minutest fractions of an inch to perhaps half an inch. Occasionally a petal or a group of petals had been plucked out altogether.

"An alphabet cipher message," he told himself. A smile of satisfaction wreathed his face. Even though Von Strindheim was suspicious of him, at least he would hardly suspect that he might be dealing with an expert in the breaking down of secret ciphers.

A glance at his watch told Elton that he could spare two hours and yet reach Belfort in time to return to Paris by four o'clock of the next afternoon. With pencil and paper he set himself to the task of extracting the symbols from the dog fennel. An hour of labor netted him definite progress toward the key to unlocking the mystery. There were five lengths cut in the petals. Adding the missing petals suggested six columns or a division of the alphabet into six columns.

The most frequent column of letters was that symbolized by very slight cuts, the clipping of the veriest fragment from the tip of a petal. He deduced from the arrangement that the length of the cut indicated the particular letter column intended, the number of successive cuts of a particular length, the exact position of the letter in that column. He laid out the alphabet in the six columns and began experimenting with the headings. The high frequency of the very short cuts suggested the letter "E" which appears most frequently in ordinary usage in the English language. From that beginning he worked out his headings. For convenience in manipulating his worksheet, he numbered the columns, each number indicating a cut-length. Another hour of effort and the secret key clicked in the lock. His worksheet read:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
a	f	k	p	u	z
b	g	l	q	v	
c	h	m	r	w	
d	i	n	s	x	
e	j	o	t	y	

With the number and kind of petal-cuts on each flower of the bouquet laid out on paper, it was the work of only a few minutes to transcribe the secret message from his worksheet, now that he had the key. Thus each petal that was cut very slightly at the tip referred to the first column of letters. If a single petal was cut, it meant the first letter in that column—"A"; if five successive petals were cut, it referred to the fifth letter in the column or "E". A missing petal referred, in the same way, to the fifth column, two missing petals in succession leading directly to the letter "V". The symbols dissolved into letters, the letters grouped themselves into words, the words into sentences. The full message read:

> French people reacting to editorial pressure for peace parley. Paper influence so valuable I am personally directing editorial propaganda, passing as French journalist. This in addition to my six other rôles which makes it urgent that funds for completion of purchase of *Le Journal* be sent from New York immediately to relieve me of financial details. Political and military situation unchanged.
>
> —VON STRINDHEIM

The meaning of the message disclosed itself to Elton as he rode. He remembered the French editorial comment that had disturbed his peace of mind when the paper was delivered to him along with Von Strindheim's first monogrammed cigaret. He remembered German propaganda operations in the United States before America declared war. Propaganda, the weapon which was to help the German armies conquer the world. One sentence stood out in his mind, danced alluringly before his eyes: "I am personally directing editorial propaganda, passing as French journalist." And a second line: "This in addition to my six other rôles . . ."

By good fortune he got past the military barriers along the highway without being delayed for examination and, his machine working perfectly, pulled into Belfort on schedule. His stay there was nothing more than a reenactment of his previous visit, Mlle. Dupre weakly handing him a second photograph from her sick bed.

"It is a much clearer picture than the poor one I sent before," she explained. "My dear friend will be so glad to receive it from your hand, monsieur."

Elton bowed himself out of her presence at once, without attempting to engage her in conversation. Time, he felt, was now more precious than anything this woman might unwittingly disclose. Besides, she had confirmed one fact by her simple statement, the fact that Elton was not wholly trusted. They were depending on his simplicity rather than his loyalty for the security of their messages.

Racing on Paris at a dangerous speed, he gained what he estimated as thirty minutes by high noon and halted in another obscure lane to study the photograph. It was identical with the first picture in every superficial detail. The same men stood in the same postures, in the same loose military formation. To all appearances it was simply a second print, a slightly clearer one than the first. The English nephew was not singled out in ink this time, but at the bottom of the picture was written the line—

> This is a clearer print of our dear nephew.

He examined the words for code meaning. They yielded no trace of hidden meaning. The message must be in the photograph itself, he told himself. But where, and how? The last of his precious time was close at hand when his eye caught a curious detail. Few of the men were looking at the camera when the picture was taken. In a posed picture men invariably look straight at the camera lens, or in that direction. With this clew he searched the picture again. Its secret suddenly leaped up from the print. He saw that some of the men looked slightly to the right, others slightly to the left, a few straight ahead, others up, others down. The purpose was clear. An alphabet cipher message, its words conveyed by the eyes of the soldiers, allied prisoners forced to pose as they were told.

On the theory that the Germans had used the same cipher system used in the flowers, he set to work breaking it down. It yielded promptly to this test. Direction of gaze indicated one of six columns of the divided alphabet. The number of men looking in unison in that direction located the particular letter intended. Slowly but surely he wrote down the letters, divided them into words and read the result:

> Lieut. Von Schiller who should have reported yesterday is dependable and able for use at American headquarters. He will remain at your disposal for the time being—
>
> —CLAUSSWITZ

When he had read the two messages again and again, memorizing every word, he burned the sheet of paper upon which he had written them, stamped the ashes into the ground, and proceeded to Paris. The hidden entrance in the subway station moved aside to admit him the moment he presented himself, exactly at the designated hour for his return. But inside Von Hintzen had not emerged from his inner lair to receive the message from Belfort. The chamber was empty.

CHAPTER IX

ELTON ACTS

HALF an hour elapsed, half an hour in which Elton felt the stirrings of anxiety. Could it be possible that he had been shadowed, his long halts along the countryside detected? Or had the time of passing given points *en route* been checked by resident German agents? German thoroughness would leave nothing to chance. But he found reassurance in the contempt with which American intelligence was regarded by the Prussian army. They would hardly be concerned with a fear that their cunning cipher would be unraveled.

Sounds of footsteps roused him. Von Hintzen was coming at last, and Elton, seated on the floor in a corner of the room, rested his head upon his knees in the natural pose of a wearied courier. He heard the other enter the chamber and approach.

"I am sent by his Excellency to receive from you a certain photograph," announced an unfamiliar voice.

Elton stood up. Before him was a young man in civilian clothes, a man of perhaps twenty-four, whose straight shoulders and stiff posture told of military service. The fellow might have been an American, with his clear cut features, his frank, open expression and his accent when he spoke. Elton, in a swift summary of the man, judged him an Austrian of the better class—or perhaps even an Alsatian German, or a German-American.

"*Mein Gott in Himmel!*"

The man gave a sharp exclamation, one in which fear and rage were mingled. At the moment he was receiving the photograph from Elton's hands. He let it drop from his hands.

"What's gone wrong now?" Elton demanded blankly, searching the other's face in vain for some explanation of the outcry.

"So it is you again?" The fellow had recovered from the shock of his first glimpse of the American's face. His eyes blazed in fury as he added through clenched teeth, "This time it shall be a different story. *Mein Gott*, it is a voice from heaven that brought me here—before it was too late."

Elton's mind grasped the peril in a flash. The German had identified him—a positive recognition in which there was no uncertainty. A spy nest east of Belfort, which he had uncovered on the American Front two weeks before, swept through his mind. One *espion* had escaped the net there. This must be that man, come to Paris to serve Von Strindheim.

The German was backing slowly out of the chamber, his face twisted into a malignant grin of triumph, when Elton sprang toward him. The fellow stepped to one side to avoid the impact. Elton missed and crashed against the wall. In a flash he had recovered himself and rushed a second time to grapple with the man before he could sound an alarm or withdraw from the chamber. The German whipped out a long bladed knife and raised the weapon in defense.

"I have no wish to kill you," the German said, regaining something of his self-control. He held the knife ready to strike. "But if you rush again I shall be forced to let you impale yourself upon my blade."

As Elton hesitated before the threat of the glittering blade, the German resumed his movement out of the chamber. Elton gathered himself for a final plunge at the fellow's throat. He knew full well the fate that awaited him once his antagonist was clear of the hole. Then he would be without even a fighting chance, a rat in a trap, left to die of suffocation. Besides, there was something more than his life at stake—his mission—perhaps the lives of thousands.

ELTON precipitated himself forward with the sudden fury of a trained boxer and whipped a swift, devastating hook from short range at the other's jaw. The blow landed fairly. The German, with a cry of rage and pain, lunged viciously with his knife, but a split fraction of a second too late to reach Elton's hand or arm. And before the fellow could orient his groggy senses, Elton was upon him, one hand choking off his breath against outcry, the other twisting his knife wrist with the power of a tourniquet.

There was a primitive, barbaric fury in the struggle that followed. Both fought with the desperation of men who know they fight to the death, their passions fired by war lust and fanned to white heat by the instinct of self-preservation. It was one man's life or the other's. There could be no truce, no backing down. Elton fought aggressively, seeking to strangle, to gain possession of the knife, to end the conflict quickly in the knowledge that time was allied against him. The German fought defensively, struggling to loosen the clutch upon his windpipe, to retain his grip of the knife, to delay the combat until other denizens of the spy nest would be attracted to his rescue.

The grip at the German's throat began to tell. He grasped spasmodically at the hand that was crushing the life out of him. In doing so he released momentarily the iron tension of his knife arm. Elton, his fighting instinct keyed up to the highest pitch of alertness, instantly seized the advantage. He threw all of his strength against the knife and plunged the German's wrist sharply inward.

A stifled gasp escaped the German's tortured throat at the thrust of the blade. His body sagged, his strength snapped and he went to the stone floor. Elton seized the knife in his own hand. But he lacked the cold heartlessness to strike a fatal blow upon a man who already was dying. Instead he moved the German to the center of the floor and searched the wall for the secret spring. In a moment the trap door sprung open and there was a heavy splash in the foul water below.

His own strength vanished as the crisis passed. His legs buckled under him and he sank in weakness to the floor. Elton sat there without effort to rise, his body convulsed by the ague of sudden exhaustion, until he was goaded into animation by the sound of a sharp voice. He recognized the voice of Von Hintzen and got to his feet with an effort.

"What is the meaning of this!" Lieutenant Von Hintzen exclaimed sharply. His eyes were searching the chamber. They came to rest upon Elton.

With an effort Elton rallied his flagging senses and turned to face this new crisis.

"I was attacked viciously—while trying to carry out your orders, sir," he said.

"Attacked—by whom—carrying out what orders?" There was a rising passion in Von Hintzen's voice.

"Your orders that the photograph from Mlle. Dupre should be surrendered only to your hands," said Elton. "I presume by the fellow's vigor in trying to overpower me and take the picture he must have been of the secret police. But the Lord was on our side and I delivered you the picture, as you directed."

Von Hintzen took the photograph from Elton's outstretched hand without looking at it. His eyes were burrowing into the American.

"A smooth one, eh?" he said half aloud. "And to what extent did you injure him before you dropped him below?"

"I turned his own knife upon him, held in his own hand, as his Excellency would have done it," said Elton. "He will not be back."

"Fool!" snarled Von Hintzen. "The man was Lieutenant Von Schiller of our own service. You will pay—" He broke off abruptly and his mood changed; his voice became sympathetic. "But how could you know, my friend?" he asked with a wry smile. "You were right in refusing to disobey your orders from his Excellency. It was Von Schiller's unhappy mistake. But how sad that he should find such an end—the gallant Von Schiller. Him with the Iron Cross of the second class for extraordinary heroism in battle, to find a grave in the sewer of Paris."

The officer lighted a cigaret and handed one to Elton, a cigaret bearing the coronet of Von Strindheim.

"So it must go in war," he added with a shrug of the shoulders that closed the incident of Von Schiller. "Now we must take up the duty of the moment. You are very weary, my friend?"

"I'll be all right in a few minutes more," said Elton.

"Excellent," rejoined Von Hintzen. "It is important that you leave almost at once for Belfort, with these flowers for Mlle. Dupre."

Elton noted for the first time that the officer carried a thick bunch of fennel, eloquent assurance that a forced trip to the frontier had not been devised suddenly by Von Hintzen for purposes growing out of the killing of Von Schiller.

"It is a hard trip, but I can make it if such are my orders," he said.

"The spirit of a true soldier," said Von Hintzen. His voice became soft and flattering. "His Excellency is delighted with your work and if you succeed again tonight, I am empowered to assure you that you will receive a most fitting reward for what you have done. One moment, please, and I will see you safely on your way."

Von Hintzen disappeared into the labyrinth briefly, reappearing in a long coat that reached almost to his heels. On his head was a linen civilian driving cap and in his hand he carried a lawyer's leather brief case. As in an afterthought he took a sheet of blank paper from the brief case, extracted a pencil and rapidly jotted down a message which he sealed in an envelope and delivered to Elton.

"Please hand this personal note to Mlle. Dupre," he smiled graciously. "It is nothing more than a list of certain securities in which she will be greatly interested—and yet it is important that you deliver it into her hands at the earliest moment. Again, *bon voyage*, Herr Strothers."

THE PRUSSIAN turned to the exit, bidding Elton to follow him into the subway station as soon as the lookout gave him the door. And though Elton was out in the station almost on Von Hintzen's heels, the Prussian had vanished miraculously. Close at hand stood a French officer of artillery, faultlessly uniformed, immaculately groomed. Elton saw with a start that the French officer's eyes were fast upon him. As he started to move past, the Frenchman halted him, politely but firmly.

"Pardon, monsieur," the French officer challenged in a high pitched official voice. "But from where does Monsieur ze Lieutenant come at zis moment? One moment you are not—ze next moment you are!"

"I am an American M. P. officer on important business," said Elton with annoyance. "By what authority do you question me?"

"Ze authority *militaire!*" shot back the officer. "I am of ze intelligence service of ze *armée française*. Please to permit zat I examine ze *carte identité*."

"With pleasure, monsieur," said Elton. He exhibited the excellent forgery that had been provided him against just such an emergency by the painstaking Von Hintzen.

"*Bon!*" exclaimed the Frenchman, passing back the identification card. "Now ze orders of travel?"

"Now see here," Elton protested, fixing the Frenchman with a bellicose glare. "You're interfering with an American officer in the performance—"

Elton broke off in mid sentence. He blanketed a sudden upheaval of emotion within by looking quickly at the ground and fumbling in his pocket. It had swept his mind when the Frenchman's eyebrow moved very slightly up and down, an involuntary twitching. A keen intuition had bridged the gulf. He had recognized in the pseudo-Frenchman the elusive Von Hintzen. A thousand bits of information raced through Elton's mind, and pieced together, now coherent, fitted into a definite mold. Von Strindheim's report of his half dozen rôles. Von Hintzen, then, was many men. A consummate actor whose art in controlling posture, expression, voice, makeup, enabled him to be chief of staff, minor assistant, French lieutenant of artillery, editor of a great Paris newspaper. And when he was not Von Hintzen, or one of Von Hintzen's handy men, he was Von Strindheim himself.

"Monsieur does not find ze order of travel?" the other prompted Elton. "Zen perhaps monsieur will come wiz me to ze Bureau Militaire for interrogation."

"Don't try to pull that on me!" Elton glared back, now in control of himself again. "I'm on important business—looking after an American deserter—and I'm not going to be delayed by you or any one else. You got my name. Report it to headquarters if you want."

He caught a glint of amusement in the fellow's eyes as he forced his way past and boarded his train. The other did not follow him or raise any further protest. What, he demanded of himself, was the Prussian's game in halting him? Was it merely another clever test or was there some deeper design behind the incident?

As the train moved out of the subway station Elton's iron control relaxed. His body shook from head to foot under the emotion that had wracked him within the past few minutes. He did not question his intuition or analyze the chain of circumstance that had flashed through his mind in the moment of recognition. He accepted it as fact that Von Strindheim was a man of many rôles, a lone wolf who trusted no man too far—and one of those rôles was that of Von Hintzen. There remained, then, but the trick of springing a trap about that cunning neck. As to how quickly and how effectively the *espion* could change his rôle—he had just seen the miracle for himself.

Thanks for the long days of mid June, Elton was well out of Paris before sunset. He followed the route to Belfort, passing Provins and turning off beyond that village at the point where the highway forks to the south and east. There was no thought in his mind of abandoning his mission as a courier of the Prussian crown. It might be necessary to carry on indefinitely—for weeks, perhaps, risking his neck until an effective trap could be devised with the aid of opportunity. A forcing of the issue now might only spoil all that he had done and end in his own certain death.

He halted, while the light of day was yet bright, in another secluded spot far back from the main highway. First of all he must decipher the baron's message of dog fennel. Now that he had the key, the cipher yielded promptly. He wrote it down, letter by letter, and studied the amazing product. It read:

> Request you transfer Lt. Joubert from Belfort to Germany and hold him in close confinement at all times. Entire propaganda would be ruined should he escape and return to his paper. I am using editorial office to good advantage as Joubert is last man to be suspected because of his war service. Hasten money from New York for second payment shortly due owners so they can not object to editorial methods.
>
> —VON STRINDHEIM

The message cleared up the mystery of another Von Strindheim rôle, forged another link in the manacles that threatened the dreaded Prussian *espion*. So Von Strindheim had caused the French editor's disappearance in order to engage himself in the Frenchman's rôle. Prussian gold, secretly applied, was to silence the possible protests of patriotic owners. The Kaiser, then, still kept faith in the insidious weapon of propaganda, a weapon with which he sought to weaken the will of the civilian populace the while his armies hammered the morale of fighting armies on the front lines.

ELTON was mounting his motorcycle when he remembered the note handed him at the last minute by the Prussian officer. It had been crowded from his mind for the moment by the first message. Since the missive was sealed, he debated upon the discretion of forcing the flap. It could not have been of great importance, he argued, else Von Strindheim hardly would have treated it with so little precaution. He ended by forcing the flap of the envelope with scrupulous care in an effort to leave no evidence of his prying.

His judgment in opening the letter was confirmed when he noted that the message was in cipher. Oddly enough, as he saw at a glance, it was the discarded German cipher that Von Strindheim had used in his letter to Colonel Ourq. The brevity of the message caught his interest, caused him to delay until he had deciphered its meaning. The cipher message read:

> See to it this man never returns to Paris.

Elton looked at the message only long enough to check his work for accuracy. Then he set his motorcycle in motion, vaulted into the saddle and turned at high speed into the road that led toward Belfort.

But he knew now that he was not going to Belfort. That message forced the issue with Von Strindheim. Elton smiled grimly at the Prussian's wily prank, sending him with the order for his own execution. It did not surprise him that Von Strindheim had taken such a step. Even if the messenger fell into enemy hands, the note would be harmless enough, and the message of flowers as inscrutable as the cable code of Nauen. So Von Strindheim must have reckoned, even as the Prussian leaders laid their dependence in German infallibility and Allied stupidity.

AN HOUR at high speed took him to the first American military barrier. He removed the flaming M. P. brassard from his arm, slowed down to a gradual stop and told an incoherent story to the sergeant in charge. The sergeant called his lieutenant, whose suspicions were aroused by the officer's garbled story of his travels. Elton was held for investigation and taken to the captain in command of the barrier.

"I am wanted by G. H. Q," he confessed to the captain. "A very serious charge and, since I've decided to surrender, I'm only asking the privilege of talking personally to my friend, Colonel Rand. I wrote him of my desire to surrender and he asked me to come here and telephone him."

The captain registered suspicion but finally succumbed to the prisoner's insistence that G. H. Q. must know immediately and from his own lips. Headquarters finally got Colonel Rand on the telephone and Elton had him dismiss the local captain from the room during the conversation.

"Please phone Paris headquarters at once," said Elton. "Have Sergeant Walters and his men take me in. It will clear his record, since it was from him I made my getaway at—"

"See here, what are you talking about, Elton?" the colonel demanded.

"You misunderstand, sir," Elton rejoined. "This is Private Strothers, wanted for desertion and escape and heaven knows what else. They nipped me here at the American barrier—and I'm asking that my old friend Sergeant Walters have a chance to take me in. I gave him a rough deal escaping from him in Paris last week. Since I'm done for anyhow, thinks I, it's only right to give him the breaks. Will you please do this for an old-timer, sir?"

"I see," said Colonel Rand in sudden understanding. "It'll go hard with you, Strothers. We'd have gotten you anyway—but I'm glad you surrendered."

"I'm feeling pretty low, sir. It'd cheer me a lot if my old C. O. could say a word for me at Paris before it's too late."

"I'll think it over, Strothers. I was just leaving for Paris headquarters for conference and may look in on you."

"Thank you, sir—if the Colonel would only hurry!"

AS NEARLY as he could estimate, Sergeant Walters would arrive by military automobile from Paris in two and a half hours. In five hours he would be back in Paris, a prisoner. Colonel Rand, by fast driving, could reach Paris from headquarters in five hours. Elton already had mapped out his plan of attack. Ample time remained in which to lay out the details. Before midnight he would be ready to move in upon his Excellency, the Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim.

Sergeant Walters, when he arrived to receive the prisoner, met the situation magnificently. His only sign of recognition was a snarl, followed by a profane dressing down of the glum and repentant captive.

"Give yourself up, did you?" raged Walters. "Well, if they don't hang you for the stuff you've pulled, I'll tear off my chevrons. A disgrace to the Army you are, and to the whole two legged race of man. My only regret is that I didn't get sight of you on the highway—within shooting distance."

"When I gave up, Sergeant, I asked to have you get me," muttered the prisoner. "I tried to give you a square break after—"

"Shut up!" roared Walters. "Get out there and into that car—and one false move means we'll take your worthless carcass in dead!"

During the long run into Paris, the old sergeant found an opportunity to whisper to his chief without risk of being overheard by the escort above the roar of the car.

"I hope I didn't lay it on too strong, sir," he apologized. "But I thought that was the situation."

"You did nobly, as usual," Elton said.

"I feel something big in the air, sir—any chance for me to give a hand?" There was a note of pleading on the noncom's words.

"It's very likely, Walters," said Elton. "But I'm in executive session at present, if you'll excuse me."

CHAPTER X

THE SHOWDOWN

A FEW minutes before midnight a French rifle battalion, war strength and marching with full field equipment, passed through the heart of Paris. The troops had been hurriedly roused from their quarters and set in motion. The only knowledge they had of their destination was from the grapevine that pervades all armies and fills the ranks with rumor. It told them that they were entraining for the Front, to meet an emergency.

At a street intersection, the two rear companies were ordered into a side street. The gait of the others was quickened to double time. In less than a minute the battalion was in position surrounding a large four story building, while orders were barked at them to let no one pass in or out. Hung from the second floor of the building was a sign proclaiming to the world that here was the office of publication of *Le Journal*.

Two men, in the garb of printers, their sleeves rolled to the elbows and their faces grimy with printer's ink, walked down the editorial corridor at the same moment. They entered the editor's office without knocking. There was but one man in the room at the moment—the editor—of which fact they had informed themselves before going in. The editor was half way across the room, attracted by the beating of hobnailed shoes on the paved street below. He stopped at sight of the two printers and surveyed them sharply.

"You sent for us, monsieur?" inquired one of the two intruders, in perfect French, bowing humbly.

"What impudence is this?" snapped the editor. He walked back to his desk and was passing behind it when another voice stopped him with the force of a blow.

"Not the slightest move!"

It was an American voice and it crackled with intensity. Behind the order loomed a .45 caliber Army automatic.

The editor smiled, a genuine smile in which there was an arrogant disdain of the danger he faced.

"Perhaps when the guillotine looms over your necks, you will not feel quite so bold over this intrusion," he cut at them. He moved slowly back toward the wall which stood three feet behind him.

"Stop! Move another inch and I'll bore you!" the man with the pistol threatened. His voice and manner left no slightest question of his intent.

The first man moved to a window and crashed his foot through a large pane. The splintering of glass awakened an echo of sharp French commands below. In a moment there was the rumble of many feet coming into the building.

"Who are you, and what is the meaning of this outrage?" the editor inquired, his iron nerve unshaken.

"I am Sergeant Walters, United States Army," said the soldier, "and my trigger finger is a lot quicker than any trick you or any of your kind can pull on me."

"Ah, a fool American," the editor drawled sarcastically. "Well, I have no intention of inviting your fire. I presume your attendants will be here in due time to return you to your padded cell—and your Government will apologize in proper form."

"I said *stand tight!*"

Walters's voice was at the end of its patience. His prisoner had edged a foot nearer the wall.

"If I must stand here with my hands in the air," sneered the editor, "at least I can have the comfort of the wall to lean against."

He made another move, a slow move that carried him close to the wall. His hand moved very slowly backward, almost imperceptibly. It touched the wall. A secret panel moved aside. Then the room filled with sound, the roar of Walters's automatic. The sergeant was hard in the wake of the bullet, his arm clutching the other as he was falling, a bullet through his wrist, into the secret cavity.

Walters dragged him back into the room, jerked him to his feet and secured him by handcuff to his own wrist. The room filled with French soldiers, their bayonets hemming captor and captive in with a bristling wall of steel.

"I DEMAND to know," the prisoner cut at the French commandant who had appeared with his men, "why this outrage is visited upon me? I am Lieutenant Joubert, invalided from the French army, editor of *Le Journal*—and it is your duty to protect me. You shall pay dearly for this, my Commandant!"

Not even the gaping wound in his wrist unstrung the man. He remained the most collected person in the room. His thin cold face was pale and drawn but his eyes burned with outraged passion. The French major turned deathly pale at the threat. He stammered an apology, that he was following orders, that it was not he who should pay if his superiors had erred.

"You can do the rest of your talking at headquarters," Sergeant Walters spoke up. His voice was even, almost respectful, tempered by the regard of one brave man for another. "Please remember that your only chance to get away is by dragging me with you," he added. "I'm sorry you made me shoot you, but if I have to do it again it'll not be in the wrist."

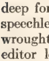
At the headquarters of American forces in Paris, the outraged editor was met with an odd edict. Terse instructions were given by a colonel that he be stripped of the French uniform he wore and given a warm bath, a thorough scrubbing. Even Sergeant Walters, accustomed to endless unintelligible orders, was nettled by the instructions. The prisoner was immaculate, spotless, clean shaved—the last man in the world who had any appearance of needing a bath. The sergeant, however, insisted upon having the bath administered without release of the handcuff, even though his own sleeve got wringing wet in consequence.

"Well of all the—"

Sergeant Walters's surprise was too deep for mere words. He broke off into speechless gaping at the transformation wrought by the water. The French editor lost his florid color. Patches of dark hair dropped from his head and changed its contour. The lines of the fellow's mouth changed, the whole set of his face, though this came from a relaxation of muscles as well as loss of the skillfully applied touch of artifice.

"Say, mister, you look to me like you might be a Boche," the sergeant commented when he could regain his voice. "I was getting worried, to tell you the truth. Afraid a friend of mine had pulled a prize bonehead but I'm feeling easier since we had our little bath. Now, come right this way, if you please."

"Good evening, my friend. I'm glad to have this opportunity of explaining to you why I was unable to reach Belfort with your kind message."



THE PRISONER started at the sound of Elton's voice, as he was brought face to face with the American in a small, brightly lighted room on the second floor of the headquarters building. A look of fear flitted across his face. Then his matchless self-possession reclaimed him. His blue eyes lighted with a cynical smile.

"Do not flatter yourself too far, my friend," he said with cool composure. "I pay the price of my present slight inconvenience merely because I disregarded my own intuitions and judgment." He added hastily, "As well as those of his Excellency, whose judgment I should have accepted as infallible."

"Excellent, your Excellency," Elton mocked.

"My gratitude for the station to which you advance me." The prisoner bowed.

"But why not, when you have done so yourself as a daily practise, my dear Baron Erich Wolf Von Strindheim."

"Now you flatter me." The Prussian smiled complacently, without wincing at sound of the name. "Would that I had the gifts of his Excellency—I would at this moment be in far more comfortable circumstances."

Elton's face hardened. He dropped the exchange of badinage.

"Now see here, Von Strindheim," he shot out. "Let's throw off the masks. It isn't becoming to a man of your gifts to equivocate when there's nothing to be gained by it. You're clever enough to know that you wouldn't be here if we didn't know who you are. And before morning we'll have the rest of your crew in hand, even if we have to dynamite the walls down on them."

The Prussian's insolent assurance did not waver.

"I am Lieutenant Hans Von Hintzen," he replied. "I make no denial of my identity, under the circumstances."

"Very true. Likewise, you are Von Strindheim, and several other persons—all one and the same man."

"Saying a thing and proving it, even in an abominable French court martial, are two different things. The proud name of his Excellency will not be drawn again into your war propaganda as it was before when they took the wrong head."

"There is the proof of your photograph—"

"I have had no photograph in many, many years," the Prussian interrupted.

"A minor thing, but you have a slight

affliction of the eyebrows. It was that, my dear Baron, that first let me see through your disguises."

"Mannerisms are contagious, my friend, as you must well know."

"Then perhaps you can laugh off this little link in the chain. My own death warrant, which you handed me to carry to Belfort?"

Elton took from his pocket the fatal message to Mlle. Dupre and held it under the Prussian's eyes. The prisoner studied it impassively. From another pocket the American drew a second cipher message, Von Strindheim's favorite cipher, the original of his insulting message to Colonel Ourq.

"Now is the case clear to you, Von Strindheim?" he demanded. "The two messages were written by the same hand. Since the French have identified and verified your handwriting in the note you sent Colonel Ourq—it was a very simple matter for me to verify the little *billet-doux* you handed me for delivery to my executioner. I might add, too, that I deciphered your dog fennel cipher. In fact, it took little time and effort."

To Elton's surprise, Von Strindheim was looking at him now with smiling eyes. The mask was gone. Without words he was communicating to Elton the uselessness of further evasion. No shadow of fear crept into his face or voice as he accepted defeat.

"My friend," he confessed, "you appear to hold the advantage of me at the present moment." The smile passed into a superior, cynical glint. "I will pay you the compliment of saying I am grateful that it is not you who is charged with the further details of my case."

"Thank you, Von Strindheim. You mean—"

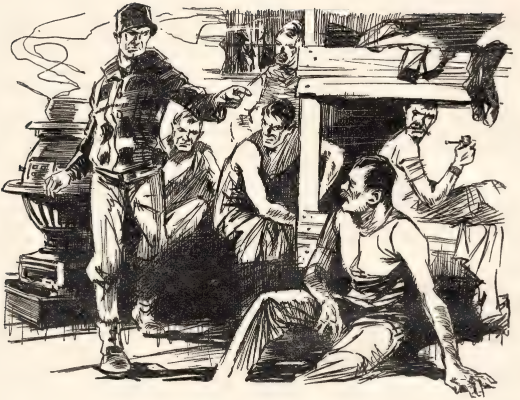
"That it remains for French military law and custody to proceed with my trial and—execution."

"I should not think you would find much comfort in that thought, my dear Baron."

Von Strindheim shrugged his shoulders and half turned to indicate that he was ready to be received by the French military escort. His tantalizing assurance possessed him fully again. He bowed stiffly, from the waist.

"*Bon nuit, monsieur,*" he said. "Perhaps, one day, we shall meet again. Who can say? And in the meantime, *bon voyage*."

"The Spy Trap" is the first of a series of stories of the Military Intelligence which Ared White has written expressly for *Adventure*. The author's vivid tales of men in war have already won him wide acclaim. We are certain, however, that nothing he has heretofore done approaches in sheer drama and fascinating incident these new stories describing the exploits of the master spies within and without the lines of battle. Look for the next one in an early issue!



A New Story of the Northwest Lumber Camps

by JAMES STEVENS

FIST AND BOOT

NOVAK'S hand relaxed as it touched the knob of the bunkhouse door. He hesitated, scowling at the rain soaked panels before his eyes. There was no fear in his heart. The boss of Camp 5 was certain of that; husky though the top loader was, he, Anton Novak, had whipped bigger loggers in pairs without harm to himself. His proudest boast was that the worst scars he carried were on his knuckles.

No. Any man in the six Brainerd camps would have laughed at the idea that Highball Anton ever knew a pang of fear. He had proved his courage not only in battle but in the dangerous labor of the woods. In the bunkhouses the story was still told of the Bohunk kid brakie who stuck to a Brainerd logging train when it broke loose from the Shea on Spur 3, who set the brakes, with death facing him at every turn of a wheel, and saved the train.

The superintendent made him a blacksmith's helper as a reward. He learned to splice wire rope. Before long he was a high-rigger. He began to swagger and fight. In ten years he was a camp boss, with the wildest life behind him of any logger on the Northwest Coast.

Up by muscle and a heart of white hot steel. That was the story of Anton Novak, the Bohunk. The men who despised his race he battered out of the way. And here he was, thirty and at the top.

At the top, so the loggers said. A camp boss for the big Brainerd outfit. How much higher than that could a Bohunk look? The loggers wanted to know.

Anton Novak himself wanted to know. The question had become a torment during the last year. It stared him in the eyes now, as he hesitated in front of the top loader's bunkhouse. A year ago there would have been no question. Then, a wrathful telephone message from the logging superintendent telling him that the log loads on three trucks of the Camp 5 train had given way on the main line, would have sent him for his top loader without a stop for breath.

One huge paw would have gripped the man by the throat, the other would have been clenched into a threatening fist, and the negligent loader would have been told what was what in the hottest terms of logging camp speech, with hardly a trace of the old country growl. If the man had wanted to fight—well! Anton Novak had become more than an American; he had become an American logger of the hardest old-time school.

But the old times were done. Men in the Northwest woods could no longer be ruled by fists and calk boots. Novak had begun to realize that. The two newest bulls of the woods on the Brainerd line called themselves camp superintendents and were graduates of forestry schools. Novak growled with contempt when he thought of them. He had no fear for his own job. But a chief was soon to be picked for the headquarters camp. The logging superintendent, Darby Quinn, was already talking of retiring . . .

Anton Novak thought of all this seriously now, as he had thought of it so often during the past year. He wondered whether he could go any way but his own. Would going soft and easy ruin him? He was only a fighter, he decided somberly; with the day of the fighter gone, he too would go from the woods—from the timber country . . . Forgetting his present purpose, he stared out through the winter rain.

The timber country. It seemed as grand to him now as it had when he first saw it, a kid with a gang of immigrant logging railroad builders. He had become its man from the first. Never had his heart turned back to the old country. Once, he remembered, the land had touched his heart as though he were a girl.

The end of a day much like this one. Himself hanging behind the gang dragging down the grade to the bunk cars. Standing by a Douglas fir hundreds of years old. Looking out over five ridges of timber, dark green slopes and ridges under low gray clouds, dim in a soft mist and the first shadows of twilight. Never had the rousing smells from the wet mold of the forest floor so delighted him. There were smells from the great green boughs above him, too; and the breeze blowing from the harbor had a salty tang. How he loved the land just then! He had pressed his fuzzy cheek against the shaggy bark of the Douglas fir, and for a time it seemed that the tree was talking to him, uniting him to its life. Then, suddenly, he had felt ashamed. He had been acting like a girl. But he was flushed with the strength of manhood for the first time. In that hour the Anton Novak the Brainerd men knew had been born. He had seized the vital spirit of the timber country for his own.

He would not yield this place in the life of this land of his, Anton Novak told himself. He would use his head. He would speak kindly to the top loader. It would be hard to change his ways, but he could see the necessity. Speak kindly, he sternly admonished himself, as his big knuckled hand once more reached out to open the bunkhouse door. Light flowed over him as he stepped inside. There was a sudden hush around the bunkhouse heater.

THE HUSH had fallen in the midst of a loud declaration from the shadows beyond the heater—

"And if that highball Bohunk of a bossman tries to tell *me* anything . . ."

Novak knew that voice. It belonged to the man he was after—Spade Brackett, for three weeks a top loader in Camp 5. Novak halted in the doorway. The rain drove in behind him. Before him the light of the swinging lamps glowed over faces turned toward him. He saw the gleam of excitement in every eye. He felt the blood leap to his face. The old ache for battle throbbed in his knuckles. The bunkhouse gang knew he had overheard the top loader's contemptuous speech. They were waiting for the camp boss to show himself in his bully style. For ten years he had met trouble with fist and boot. The urge was powerful in him now.

But this new resolve was also powerful in him. Novak was still determined to use his head; to prove to the Brainerds that he could be as gentle and kind and tactful in handling loggers as these new men fron the colleges. The slur on his foreign birth he could afford to ignore. Long ago he had learned the futility of fighting against that. But he had come here to settle a matter of work with his top loader. And he had found the man expressing contempt for him before the other loggers. That made the business harder to carry through. But he would try. So he worked what he thought was a kind smile on to his heavy, dark face, as he swung toward the heater.

"Brackett here?" he said, in his rumbling voice.

"You bet I'm here!"

The top loader stepped out from behind the heater, and faced the camp boss belligerently.

"What you want with me, huh?"

He was certain that Novak had heard him. And he did not intend to back down. Not before this bully gang. Spade Bracket was mighty sure of himself. He was no older than Novak, he was as husky, and he had got his name in a fighting way. A Seattle policeman was responsible. He had pinched Brackett after the man had cleaned out a skidroad saloon.

"Fightin' like this is what I call diggin' your grave with your fists," said the policeman. "Come along, Spade."

He stood now before Novak, his feet spread wide, his legs stiff, his fists on his hips, and his chin jutting forward over his barrel of a chest. His heavy black brows were drawn together in a fighting scowl. His small eyes glittered savagely before Novak's steady gaze.

The sleeves of his red wool shirt were rolled up, and the light of the swinging lamps shone on bulging forearm muscles. He was lean bellied, and solid in his legs. A true fighting man of the woods, made by years of labor in the tall timber. Feeling fit to battle any man alive. Particularly Anton Novak, boss of Camp 5, in line for the headquarters camp.

Spade Brackett had his own reasons for being interested in that. But to Anton Novak, he was only a tough top loader who needed to be handled gently and kindly, after the new fashion of bossing in the woods.

"What you want with me, huh?" growled Spade Brackett. "Get 'er off your chest!"

Every man in the bunkhouse knew that this was a challenge and not a question. The camp boss knew that they knew. For an instant the habit of years asserted itself. His wide shoulders heaved, the muscles of his legs tensed for a fighting leap and hard ridges stood under the dark skin of his jaws. The old urge blazed up. Knock the man down, give him the boots, kick him out of camp. Kind and gentle palaver, hell! Not for him—but he remembered in time. The approaching vacancy at headquarters. The new way in the woods—Darby Quinn would hear of it if he battled the top loader now; even John and Jesse Brainerd might hear of it; too much to lose . . .

"Brackett," he said steadily. "I want to see you in the camp office."

He felt a thrill of triumph as he turned on his heel. No college logger could have done better than that, he told himself. Then he heard a gasp of surprise from all the loggers in the bunkhouse. That troubled him. Had to show that he was still a man of authority. He looked back. The top loader had not moved—was staring at him stupidly.

"Brackett!" He spoke harshly now. "I've got business to talk with you. In the camp office at once, understand?"

"Yeah."

Novak tramped out, leaving the door open behind him. He did not look back again. But the hum of excited talk followed him. Certain words reached him:

"Goin' soft, I'll say . . ." "Yeah, who'd 'a' believed . . ." "First time I ever saw Novak . . ."

Then the voice of Joe Harkins, the bull-bucker, boomed above the rest:

"Never fails. Ever' bully of the timber goes the same way. Goes along with the hard stuff so far, then turns soft. Fightin' fire dies out. Finished, you ask me. That's Highball Novak."

The camp boss's boots thudded to a stop in the muddy trail to the camp office. The darkness was rapidly closing down in the timber about the camp. The wind roared through the boughs in a sudden hard blast and Novak's spirit rose to meet it.

Now was the time. Go back—declare himself—fight it out. Show them all in the only way he knew—by fist and boot.

But this new resolve had been strongly taken. He could play the new game of the boss-men of the woods, play it as well as any. He would hang on, as he had stayed with that runaway logging train years ago. The Bohunk kid was still going to the top.

Yeah, he'd show 'em—but in the new style, gentle and kind . . .

There was Brackett coming out of the bunkhouse. The camp boss strode on for his office.

Back in the bunkhouse a young logger, a lowly whistle punk, listened to the old-timers recite the saga of Anton Novak, the Bohunk kid, the champion high-rigger of the harbor camps, the hardest bitten bull of the woods the Brainerd line had ever known.

"Finished now," said Joe Harkins.

"Yeah," the others agreed—excepting the husky young logger, the whistle punk, the lad down in the time-book as P. Parker.

P. Parker had had two years of college. He was trying logging instead, upon the advice of an old fashioned uncle. He had expected a glorious rowdy life in Anton Novak's camp. He still hoped for a terrific battle between the camp boss and the top loader. So he followed Brackett to the camp office. He was pleased to see that the timekeeper was not behind the commissary counter. So young P. Parker waited there breathlessly for the roar of battle to sound from beyond the partition that divided the commissary from the camp foreman's quarters. He heard nearly all that passed between the two men.

ANTON NOVAK slowly lowered his muscular bulk into the swivel chair before his desk. Impressively he turned around as Brackett stepped inside his office. The chair squeaked under his weight. The sound jarred on Novak. He swore under his breath. A swivel chair in a logging camp! That was the new damned style. Shiny desks, swivel chair, files, paperwork— Well, he had mastered all the new stuff by ferocious study, and he would master the new way of man-handling. He would not pass out with the oldtimers. He would have the headquarters camp; he would follow Darby Quinn, he would go on, rise high.

"Keep your grip on that," he admonished himself sternly. "Hang on like you did as a Bohunk kid."

"Well, what's on your chest?" said the top loader, with careless insolence.

"Sit down," said the camp boss calmly, motioning toward a chair. "A matter of business."

Spade Brackett was taken aback. Despite himself, he was overawed. He tried to tell himself that this was only Highball Anton, the Bohunk boss, sitting there in the fancy swivel chair, with a mackinawed elbow resting on the shiny oak desk. But somehow the files, the desk light, the books, and the cold aloofness of Novak created the atmosphere of the Brainerd offices in the tidewater lumber town. Down there Brackett always felt like a timber savage in a cage. Cold blooded business system. That same atmosphere made him uncomfortable now. He was on the defensive. He sat down and fumbled his hands awkwardly over his knees.

"Brackett, I hired you with the understanding that you were the best top loader on the Brainerd line," said Novak, in a cool, impersonal tone which Jesse Brainerd himself might have envied. "That's your reputation in headquarters. For three weeks you've failed to make it good. Tonight Darby Quinn telephoned me that three trucks fell to pieces on the main line. He knows your reputation. The blame falls on me. I'm supposed to handle my men in the way to get the best out of 'em. Usually I drive—you know that!"

Novak's words sounded like licks from an ax. Out in the commissary, young P. Parker held his breath. But the camp boss caught himself.

"Highball Anton, they call me," he said, lowering his voice. "But I'm not trying to drive you, Brackett. If you've got a grudge against me for any reason, tell me, and I'll clear it up. You stick with me, and you won't regret it. I promise you that, fair and square. There's all my cards, a wide open hand. I want you to do your best top loading for me. If you've got a grudge, just tell it and we'll fix it up."

There Novak stopped. It was the first time in his life he had ever reasoned in a nice, gentlemanly style with another man. It left him feeling ashamed of himself, but he remembered the stakes he was playing for, and he bucked up. He fixed a cold but kindly gaze on Spade Brackett, and waited.

The top loader was still overwhelmed with astonishment. He had never dreamed that Highball Anton would knuckle down in this style. For that was all that the cold modern business talk had seemed to Brackett—knuckling down. He had a glimmering of what Novak was after, for he, too, knew all about the promotions that were to come on the Brainerd line. But he had no conception of the thought and labor with which the man who had fought his way up under the old conditions of logging camp life, was concentrating on adapting himself to the new ways and methods. Brackett would have sneered at the notion that Highball Anton was attempting a new style of man-handling. To him the camp boss was only showing yellow at last.

"A Bohunk at heart. Showin' up," he said to himself. "Me, I'll just tease him along."

Spade Brackett had his own stake in the game. He had no desire to be fired just now, unless it was by means that would make trouble for the camp boss. So he said aloud:

"Why, I ain't got a grudge, Mr. Novak. I thought *you* had the grudge, account of me bein' a friend of Shag Hawley, you know. Worried me some, bein' blamed for my friends . . ."

Brackett stopped there, as a low fierce growl escaped Novak. The big hands of the camp boss gripped the arms of his chair. Shag Hawley, bull of the woods at Camp 3, was also in line for the headquarters job. A whisperer, a back stabber, a slick tongued blarneyer. But a logger and a fighter. A dangerous man. In a way Novak feared him. But he hated and despised the man still more. He glowered suspiciously at Brackett, but controlled himself.

"Never mind Hawley," he said, keeping his voice level and cold. "You might explain the bad loading on those three trucks today."

"It was my loyalty done it," said Spade Brackett.

He was now entirely at ease. He was sure that he could soft-soap any Bohunk alive.

"Small logs, Mr. Novak. Didn't want 'em to pile up behind the loadin' engine. Rushed the loadin'. Wanted to get out a full train. That was all. Just my loyalty, Mr. Novak. My damn' fool loyalty," said Spade Brackett grandly, rolling out the words as though he loved the sound of them.

Novak scowled. It might be true. There was no answer to such talk as that, anyway.

"Well," he said heavily, "I'll let 'er go this trip. But don't be so damn' loyal tomorrow. Load your cars like you know how."

"I'll load 'em perfect. You'll never see better loadin', Mr. Novak," promised Brackett enthusiastically. "Loyalty, that's me!"

"All right."

Novak turned back to his desk. Somehow he felt badly licked. He turned sharply as Brackett went out. He was certain that the man had laughed. There was a flash of red before Novak's eyes. One lunge took him out of the chair and to the door. The wind blew rain out of the night and against his face. He felt the powerful, pungent breath of the timber country. He heard the roaring whispers of great green boughs.

The timber country! His own! To keep his place in its life—that was the greatest battle. The desire for that held him back. Let Brackett go; he would handle him yet—new style. Novak returned to the chair. It squeaked again as he sat down. He did not notice that now. Seemed like he was licked, somehow. He had to win—had to hang on like the Bohunk kid . . .

The young whistle punk, P. Parker, slipped back into the bunkhouse unnoticed. And no one paid him any mind as he sat by the roaring heater and listened to Joe Harkins tell mighty stories about the heroic battles of Highball Anton Novak, who once belonged to that old-time company of bulls of the woods. Gone soft now, old Joe lamented. Yeah, the old-timers were no more; the old days were over.

P. Parker, the young college logger, mournfully and silently agreed. He glared at Spade Brackett and wished that he himself had five more years of growth and muscle. He knew what handling the man needed. Spade Brackett was boasting that Highball Anton had backed down before him in the office, declaring that the camp boss had entirely lost his grip, and boasting that his friend, Shag Hawley, would be the next boss of headquarters camp.

FOR TEN days the boss of Camp 5 held grimly to the new style of man-handling. And for ten days log production in Camp 5 dropped, two thousand feet by two thousand feet. Choker-setters loafed with the rigging. Fallers and buckers grew careless, and trees were brought down in crisscross fashion and were bucked into logs of odd lengths. The donkey-punchers on the yarding and roader engines no longer jumped at their levers and ran the drums at top speed. The loaders sent out beautiful loads, but not so many of them. Every man in camp agreed with Spade Brackett about Highball Anton. No. 5 was a highball camp no more. The bull of the woods had gone soft. Take 'er easy was the word.

At the end of the tenth day Anton Novak felt like a whipped man. He stood on a bank above the loading track and mournfully observed the logging scene. It was a stormy day. The distant ridges of the timbered hills merged dimly into the low rain clouds. A gray mist was over the fallers and buckers, muffling the ring of axes and the drone of saws. The prone columns of the felled timber lay on wet, black earth. The skyline rigging, reaching from head spar to tail spar, a distance of twenty-five hundred feet, made faint black lines against the gray sky. Rolls of gray wood smoke and puffs of white steam drifted up from the donkey engines.

Huge logs in the grips of chokers on the main lines plunged up the slopes, swayed, dipped into the black earth, crashed over stumps, battered brush and small trees into slivers, leaped high and boomed on for the storage pile. From there other logs were lifted by the loading engine, swung over to the trucks on the loading track, eased into place and bound with chains by the top loader and his second man.

At the end of many and many a day Anton Novak had felt his heart swell with pride when beholding this scene of labor in the big timber. He was the ruler of it all. He, Anton Novak, once a Bohunk kid swinging a pick on a logging railroad grade, had fought his way up to command over the bully men of a Brainerd camp. A man had to fight his way up in those days. It was different now, he thought grimly.

Different. Yeah. The old days of sawing, chopping and ground-lead skidding were gone. Six donkey engines were under his command now, miles of wire rope, head-blocks weighing a ton each, logging trains, section crews, and even a camp laundry which washed the bunkhouse sheets and pillow cases.

Sheets for loggers! Well, that was what it had come to. Loggers were skilled mechanics these days. Highly paid men. Had to handle them like they were white collar lads in offices. Had to, if you were going to hold on to all for which you had lived and fought.

The quitting whistle shrilled through the woods. The men were already stringing in from their labor. Novak scowled at that. How was a man to stop that unless he threatened to knock their ears down? How did the college bosses do it? It was still all a mystery to Novak. Well, he would hang on until he learned. He would not turn back, he swore to himself.

Novak sighed heavily and started down the bank. His purpose was to catch Spade Brackett on the way to camp and demand a showdown. One of the whistle punks had put a bug in his ear about Brackett. The top loader had been agitating—knocking the props from under the authority of the camp boss. Novak was determined to settle this affair with Brackett once and for all time. There would be no battle, he vowed; he would use his head—settle the business in the new soft and easy style of handling men.

But as he waited for Brackett, Novak saw the logging locomotive come to a stop with its string of empties. And Darby Quinn, the superintendent of all the camps, swung down from the cab. Novak felt a chill race up and down his spine. Instinctively he knew that at last the place in headquarters camp was open. Here and now Darby Quinn would either tell the boss of Camp 5 that he was stepping up, or briefly remark that he was going on to spend the night at Shag Hawley's camp. Novak knew Darby Quinn.

The old logging superintendent's face was like granite when Novak tramped up to meet him.

"Hello, Novak," he said shortly. "What's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" said the camp boss mechanically, already feeling the sinking sensation of defeat.

"Yep, trouble. Your production's dropped to the bottom of the six camps. What the hell!"

Novak resolved to take his licking like a man.

"It's me," he said steadily, meeting the steely gaze. "Got no excuse to make, Mr. Quinn. Equipment's O.K. So's the timber. I quit highballin' the men. Tried to talk to 'em like one of your college supers. I ain't swore at a logger for two weeks. Not even that. Well, I've fell down. But I'm sticking to it. I'll learn, if you'll give me the chance."

"That's the new policy," admitted Darby Quinn. "But we want logs."

"You've always had 'em from Camp 5 before," declared Novak.

"Yes."

Quinn looked away. He belonged to the old school himself. He, too, had risen by fist and boot. His sympathies were all with Anton Novak, but the new

Brainerd policy was an iron law. If Novak could not survive—well, he would have to go.

"You'll get your chance," he said finally. "You'll get it—here at Camp 5."

"I'm passed over for the headquarters job?" The red was creeping into Novak's face, and the question was a growl.

"Yes," said Darby Quinn. "We decided on Hawley this morning."

With a great effort Novak choked back the violent words that surged into his throat. He would take it, he told himself, take it and hang on. He would hold his own in his timber country. Show 'em yet that he could grow into the new ways. He attempted a great show of unconcern as he said to Darby Quinn—

"Who's takin' Hawley's place at No. 3?"

For answer Quinn lifted his hand, motioned toward the gang of camp bound loggers who were approaching down the track, and called—

"Brackett, come over here!"

Novak stared in stupefaction as the grinning top loader swaggered over from the gang. The other loggers stopped and watched curiously. Among them P. Parker, whistle punk, watched with wide eyes. Novak came out of his astonishment with blazes of red flashing over him. The old tide of battle, so long damned up, would no longer be denied. It leaped through his veins in a burning flood. He had an instant's clear picture of all that had happened to him. Brackett had come here to play Hawley's game, with the promise that he was to have Hawley's place when the boss of Camp 3 stepped up to headquarters. Now he knew the meaning of what that whistle punk had told him about Brackett's talk in the bunkhouse. The loggers thought he had turned yellow.

Yellow! He'd show them, even though the showing would mean the loss of all he had fought and labored for in the Brainerd camps! As Brackett, still grinning, approached, Novak's white teeth gleamed in a savage snarl. Cords of muscle stood out from his throat. He clenched his hands until his fists were as solid as mauls. His great body weaved from side to side. He hunched his shoulders, his chin jutted over his chest, his knees bent for a spring, and just as Spade Brackett opened his mouth to speak, the mighty right fist of Novak, once more the highball bully of the tall timber, smashed over it with a sound like that of an ax bit sinking into dead wood.

From the young throat of P. Parker, whistle punk, shrilled a wild whoop of joy. An old-time logger battle was on!

SPADE BRACKETT'S fame as a fighter rested on his exploit in licking seven men in a Seattle skidroad saloon without being knocked off his feet. In his bunkhouse boasts at Camp 5 he had declared that no man had ever brought him down. But now the loggers saw him lurch backward like a log when the main line yanks it in tow. His shoulders hit the wet earth first, his legs waving wildly in the air. Feet wide apart, his right fist still out, Novak stood over him for an instant. Then his calk booted foot swung as Brackett rolled swiftly, scrambling back to his feet. The boot thudded into the small of the top loader's back.

It was the old-time way of battle in the woods. The loggers recognized no namby-pamby rules—as they called them—of standing up and poking prettily at one another's noses and lips, and then waiting kindly for an opponent to get up when he was knocked down. Fist and boot! That was the old fight! You knew you would get and could give the whole works when you tangled with a man from the tall and uncut.

No one in the gang of loggers looked shocked or voiced a protest when Novak booted the man he had knocked down. Instead:

"Walk on him!" Joe Harkins yelled. "Give him the calks! Leave yer mark on him, Highball!"

But Brackett was as yet unhurt; he had only been goaded into a fighting rage. His brawny left arm whipped around Novak's leg as he rolled to his knees, and as the camp boss staggered and tugged to free himself, Brackett's right fist smashed him in the groin. Novak sagged. When the black fog of pain cleared from his eyes, he was underneath and Brackett's pitch hardened fist was hammering on his jaw.

With a mighty heave Novak freed himself, rolled to his hands and knees and leaped to his feet. Brackett, blood smeared, wild eyed, faced him, poised for a charge. Novak shook his head. The scene quickly cleared before him.

Beyond Brackett were the loggers, beyond them the timber, the rain clouds. There was his life, all that he had fought for—lost now, with Darby Quinn coldly watching from behind. Lost. He had loosened his grip on it just for this; just to give battle to a man who had injured him. Novak felt the fire die out of him; and in its place leaped the cold light of deadly hate. All he had left was the opportunity of breaking an enemy. He would be sure, cautious. He watched, catlike. At an instant when Brackett's guard slacked ever so little, Novak leaped again.

But this time Brackett only staggered; he did not go down. He did not even retreat more than a step. He slugged Novak solidly on the chin. For fifteen minutes, then, neither man yielded ground. They stood toe to toe and exchanged blow for blow; they clinched and tugged; yanked, heaved, shoved, swaying around and around in a circle. Then, breaking, they stood toe to toe again and swung hard on each other's jaws.

They stared from bruised eyes; both gasped through cut and swollen lips. For half an hour it was an even fight. Then, in the last stages of exhaustion, they went down together in a clinch. Novak was on top. Grabbing wildly with his hands, he seized Brackett's left wrist. As the top loader heaved up against him, Novak forced his arm back of his shoulders. He pried up on it, and Brackett groaned with pain.

"Quit, huh?" panted Novak. "Got enough?"

For answer a hand that was still powerful suddenly clutched his throat. His breath was shut off, but Novak could not free himself without releasing the top loader's arm. He threw all of his remaining strength into forcing it up to the breaking point, but the tensed muscles still resisted him and the choking hand only gripped his throat the tighter. Waves of darkness swept over his eyes, then a horrible weakness smote him in the pit of the stomach.

He was going . . . going . . . his own grip slipping . . . licked . . . licked . . . he wanted to say it . . . Then the shrill cry of P. Parker pierced the thickening shadows:

"Don't quit! You've got him! Don't quit! Don't quit!"

Yellow, he thought vaguely. They would say he was yellow—a Bohunk. A last surge of strength swept into his arms. He yanked savagely, desperately. A yell of pain sounded from the bulk under him; the hot iron binding his throat was gone and he was on his feet, swaying. Voices sounded through the roar in his head. . . That damn' whistle punk . .

"I knew you could lick him! Oh, gosh, what a fight!"

And Darby Quinn growled—

"Finishes you, Novak."

Then he was weaving through the trees for camp—alone.

FINISHED, he thought numbly, as he sat at the fancy oak desk, slumped in the swivel chair, his battered face resting in his hands. The grip of the Bohunk kid had slipped at last. Could not hang on to the new life. He had shown them that he had not gone yellow. That was his only consolation. It amounted to nothing, actually, when he thought of all he had lost—his place in the life of the timber country. Finished. Every man would be against him now.

The door of his office slowly opened. Darby Quinn, thought Novak dully, coming to tell him to get out of camp and off the Brainerd line.

It was Darby Quinn. He spoke, but in the voice of a chastened man.

"Young Brainerd insists I'm wrong," he said. "I admit it, since I've heard his account of Brackett's agitation. And I agree with the lad that you should go to headquarters."

"Agree with *who?*" said Novak, his head whirling again. "Who are you talking about?"

"Jesse Brainerd's nephew and sole heir, who came out here to learn logging on his own hook," said Darby Quinn, his rocklike countenance breaking in a wide grin. "He's down in the timebook, I think, as P. Parker, whistle punk."

The DESERTED GOLD CAMP

By COURTNEY McCURDY

THE thunder-throated stamps are still,
The rock-shelves rifled of their store;
And Fortune challenges no more
The miner's pick, the gambler's skill.
Stark silence holds the grass grown street;
The dust claims its eternal debt.
Where men from earth's far places met
The gray hawk and the gopher meet.

The unhinged doors show mirrored bars
In cerements of spider-shroud
Below, prone head-boards hide the proud
Names once Adventure's avatars.
One old man only, of all men,
Waits for his camp to boom again.

By BILL ADAMS

The Germans of the ship's crew awaited "Der Tag"—and then on the high seas came the news of war.

The LAST

IT WAS a very slow passage that the big bark *Lyderhorn* was making in the latter part of 1914, on the long road from Puget Sound to Falmouth. Her lower hold was three parts full of lumber from the forests of Washington State. Above the lumber was barley. And her between-decks hold, loaded with lumber in the forward part and with barley from the mainmast aft, was no more than three parts full. She was light in the water and, being light, should by rights have made a fast passage. But after three weeks with barely any breeze she ran into two long calms, one after the other. And when she picked up a breeze again it was from dead ahead.

Old George Gwilliam, her skipper, was nigh to going crazy. Wally Brown, her mate, cursed himself for a fool for having stayed so long in windjammers. When first he went to sea Wally had hoped some day to be the skipper of a flyer such as were *Silberhorn* and *Goldenhorn*. But they, and *Matterhorn* and *Englehorn* too, were gone from the face of the waters. Of all the fine 'Horn ships only bluff lumbering *Lyderhorn* was left. Alone in the darkness, Wally often shook his head and spat in a heartless fashion to the sea.

Gilbert Cutting, the second mate, who spent his dog watches in poring over navigation books, endeavoring to prepare himself for one more try at getting a mate's certificate at the end of the voyage, did not much care how long the voyage

of the 'HORNS

might be. The longer it was, the more time he'd have for figuring.

And the eight apprentices quarreled and laughed, and swapped the pictures of their girls around, and talked of getting into the naval reserve bye and bye; all but Tomkins, the eldest, who was in the reserve already; and a Scotch boy, who said that a man who went to sea was a fool. He was going to quit the sea and find a job ashore; something easy and with some money in it. And a Belgian boy, who was going into the Congo steamers.

Lyderhorn's foremast crew were a mixed lot that voyage. It was a hard matter to find an English speaking crew for a sailing ship in 1914.

There were half a dozen Spaniards in the crew. Or perhaps they were Chilenos. They were dusky anyway, and had lithe limbs and very black eyes. It was Wally Brown who took their knives and broke the points off them on the first day at sea. Wally, though a very easy going mate, never trusted a dago.

There was a Frenchman in the focsle with the dagoes; in the starboard focsle, Gilbert Cutting's watch. Gilbert Cutting swore at him only a little less than he swore at the dagoes; but, because he was far and away the best seaman in the watch, picked him out for all the fancy jobs of splicing and so forth. And Johnnie Crapeau muttered, "*Mon Dieu*", and, in as far as possible, kept out of the way of eight Germans who comprised the port watch under Wally Brown. The Germans were most of them big men, with a taste for teasing a quick tempered and very temperamental little Frenchman.

The remaining member of the second mate's watch was Joseph, a young Jamaica negro. Perhaps he has scarcely any place in this story, but there he was. Black as your hat, sloe eyed, flat footed, a very passable seaman, and exceedingly proud of being a fellow citizen to seven of the eight gay apprentices. And he was the apprentices' special delight.

On a dark night the Irish lad would cover himself with an old piece of white canvas and stalk up to the focsle head where Joseph would be keeping lookout.

The first time he did so Joseph leapt down to the main deck, yelling that there were "ha'nts" on the sea. The second time he ran to the poop and tried to tell Gilbert Cutting about the "ha'nts." And Gilbert Cutting took a belaying pin from the rail and chased him back forward. The third time Joseph made for the poop again, and old George Gwilliam, who chanced to be up and taking a midnight stroll in his pajamas, ordered the negro put in irons.

"Delirium tremens," said old George Gwilliam.

For the twenty-four hours that Joseph was kept locked up the eight boys laughed up their sleeves, and Gilbert Cutting, who'd once been an apprentice himself, kept his own counsel.

It was the grin on Tomkins' face that at last made the skipper suspicious. He ordered the negro released and the apprentices sent aft; and since he had [no evidence he gave his boys a piece of his mind in general.

"Next time any of you get caught stealing from the cook I'll give every one of you a bad reference," said he. But when they were gone he said to himself, "Every one o' them lads o' mine'll make a cracking fine officer. They've the stuff in them. Too bad it is that they will have to go into those dirty streamers."

Had it not been for the eight sturdy Germans it would have been a hard matter to handle the big barque. The dagoes were light. Johnnie Crapeau and Joseph were light. But those eight were beef, and they never hung back when a good pull was needed. And as they hauled they laughed at the second mate's light watch, and at the young apprentice lads. Had it not been that they did not want their own faces busted by Wally Brown, the eight boys would have taken a try at busting the faces of the eight "squareheads". Wally's motto was "a peaceful ship".

"Roll and go, you blasted old cargo tank," said the apprentices.

"If I don't work these problems to five places of decimals the examiner'll fire me for sure," grumbled Gilbert Cutting.

"And me like a fool thinking I'd ever be skipper of a clipper!" muttered Wally Brown. "Oh, well! More days, more dollars!"

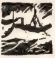
"Yes," thought old George Gwilliam, who had made up his mind to retire at the end of the voyage, "I will buy the little farm a mile out of Monmouth. I will have Alderney cows, some black pigs and a flock of speckled chickens."

"Yah," laughed the biggest of the Germans, his round blue eyes on the flushed face of Johnnie Crapeau, "vee eat oop der French!"

The other Germans chuckled. So Johnnie Crapeau went to the deck and sat on a bollard, while the six dago sailors slapped their thighs and pretended to be very much amused.

Having quite made up his mind to retire at the end of the voyage, old George Gwilliam had gotten over his impatience by the time that he sighted Pitcairn. He hove his ship to for an hour or so off Pitcairn; and what with pineapples, green coconuts, mummy apples, oranges and bananas, brought off by the natives, she looked like and she smelt like a floating fruit store when they headed her away toward Cape Horn again.

And though of late they'd been rather more quarrelsome than usual, the apprentices were at peace when Pitcairn dipped under the sea. Their bellies were full, and a full belly always did mean a contented apprentice. The mates were contented too. Germans, dagoes, Frenchman, negro, all were content. They'd both seen and scented land again, and no voyage lasts for ever. One of these days they'd come to port, draw their pay and, in the sailor's fashion, own the earth awhile.



IT WAS a week after leaving the island that *Lyderhorn* sighted a black hulled cargo tramp coming up astern. Dense smoke pouring from her funnel, she panted through the sea as, coming to heel at the call of her master, an old bitch pants through dew sodden grasses.

"Tomkins, hoist the ensign," ordered Wally Brown. "We'll speak yon dirty old tramp. She's some blasted furriner."

Up fluttered *Lyderhorn's* ensign. On came the panting freighter, and till she was close abeam of the windjammer took no notice at all of her flag. Then, as her colors ran aloft, there came over the tumbling blue waters a loud burst of cheering. From *Lyderhorn's* bows eight German sailors raised a long, deep throated shout. Another moment, and a gold braided officer upon the steamer's bridge was bawling something to the eight; bawling in a lingo that none but they aboard the *Lyderhorn* could make head or tail of. Bawling in such a tone that you might have supposed that he, and not old George Gwilliam at all, was their commander. And as he bawled the eight looked from one to another with astonished, unbelieving, questioning faces. And when he was done, the biggest of the eight shouted something back to him. And by then the freighter was out of hearing.

So it was that tidings of war came to the homewardbound *Lyderhorn*, and came to her eight German sailors only; for at the order of their big one the other seven kept their counsel.

"Vot ve going to do?" asked one.

"Ve vait. Ve see," replied the big fellow. "Some vay ve gots to obey der orders."

Toward sundown the breeze freshened. Wally Brown blew his whistle and called out all hands to trim the sails. Last instead of first, as had hitherto been their custom, came the eight German sailors.

"Step along here, you squareheads!" bellowed Wally. "What's come over you?"

"You'll get your faces busted yet," said Tomkins to a German pulling beside him. "Why'n hell don't you use your weight?"

"Ve use der veight all right. Don't you mind dot," answered the German, solemn eyes on the apprentices' sneering faces.

When Johnnie Crapeau went to the wheel that night it was too dark for Gilbert Cutting to see that his lip was cut and swollen: but looking by the binnacle light into the little Frenchman's eyes he wondered at their fiery sparkle.

"Tough on you, John Frog, ain't it," he asked, "having to live wi' all them squareheads?"

"Squareheads!" The Frenchman recognized that word. He'd heard it so often on the lips of the apprentices.

"Zose peoples," said he, "zose peoples, zey is all ze time speak vot zey call zee *'tag*." But Gilbert Cutting was gone out of his hearing.

"Damme if I think I'll ever pass for mate," grumbled Gilbert Cutting as he paced to and fro in the darkness.

"WHAT'S come over those men in your watch, mister?" asked old George Gwilliam of Wally Brown next day. "They're loafing on the job."

"It must be them blasted apprentices, sir," answered the mate. "They're all the time threatening to bust the squareheads' faces."

"Send them to me," said the skipper, and aft came the eight apprentices.

"You will understand I will have no fighting on my ship, boys," said the skipper. "We must get her along. We can't make a good passage if there is bad blood aboard her."

"The trouble with those lads, mister," said the skipper when the apprentices were gone, "is that there isn't enough work."

Lyderhorn's decks had been holystoned on her slow way down the Pacific. They were spotless. Her paint work had been scoured. It was spotless. Because her tophamper was all in first class shape there was little that even Wally Brown could think of whereby to keep the watches busy.

"Put the young blackguards to chipping in the lazarette, mister," said the skipper, importantly.

Down to the gloomy, ill smelling lazarette went the apprentices, and there Wally set them to work at chipping ancient rust from plates and beams.

Chip-chip—tap-tap went the chipping hammers for a minute or two after the mate was gone. And presently, hearing no sound in the lazarette beneath the saloon in which he sat, Skipper Gwilliam rose, passed quietly into the steward's pantry, and looked down the lazarette hatch in the deck thereof.

"A fellow that goes to sea is seven sorts of a silly fool," came the voice of the Scotch boy, "'specially with a Welsh skipper. Welsh skippers are mean as Satan."

"They aren't half as mean as the Scotch," retorted Tomkins heatedly; whereat a spirited fight started in the lantern lit lazarette.

George Gwilliam descended unobserved.

"Who started this?" he asked.

"I did, sir," said the Scotch boy.

"I did, sir," said Tomkins.

"Any more of this sort of thing and I'll give every one of you a bad reference," warned the old skipper, and ordered the two up from below.

"You two are the oldest hands in the half deck," said he, when they stood before him in the saloon. "You should know better."

He had to say something, and did not know just what to say. He'd been raised in a clipper himself, back in the grand old palmy days before the steamers came to spoil the sea; and he felt half sorry for the apprentices of his slow bark.

"Yes, sir," said Tomkins, very respectfully, and "Yes, sir," said the Scotch boy equally respectfully.

Any one of old George Gwilliam's boys would cheerfully have followed him to hell and back.

Old George Gwilliam led the way to a store room adjoining his cabin. Because *Lyderhorn* had once made a voyage to the China Seas there was in that store room a rack containing a dozen Martini rifles. There were also a couple of cases of cartridges.

"Fetch the carpenter," said the skipper.

"Chips, show these boys how to clean those rifles," said he, when the carpenter came. "That'll keep 'em quiet," said he to himself.

"Chips," said Tomkins when the old man was gone, "were you ever in the China Seas."

Chips had been much in the China Seas. He was an old man, even for a ship's carpenter. Many ship carpenters were very old men. He'd seen the Borneo pirates come off to board a Yankee clipper bound for Boston with tea. He was from Boston himself. He talked of Borneo, China, and Boston.

"It's rotten we weren't born sooner," said Tomkins. "There's no scrapping nowadays."

"Them boys, sir, they thinks they owns the earth," said Chips to the skipper as he passed through the saloon on his way back to his shop.

"I am retiring when she gets in, Chips," said the skipper, who chanced to be feeling conversational. "I am going to have a farm."

"I retired two or three times myself, sir," answered Chips. "It don't never work. A man comes back."

"I shall not come back, Chips," announced old George Gwilliam.

"Maybe not, sir," replied the carpenter. "She ain't in yet, anyway."

IF ONE knows the art of loafing on a job it can take a long time to clean an old Martini. It took Tomkins and the Scotch boy a full week to clean the dozen rifles. Wally Brown didn't interfere with them. Neither did Gilbert Cutting. Neither did the skipper, though once or twice he did put his head into the store room to growl:

"No smoking in there! You'll be getting bad references yet."

Meantime the other apprentices chipped rust in the gloom of the lazarette, and talked of their girls, and the Sydney larrikins, and called one another liars, and stole an occasional smoke and an occasional snooze. And the foremast sailors wiped and polished, and wiped and polished again; the dagoes chattering contentedly; the Germans strangely silent, strangely solemn. Almost morose, they seemed to have become. And so the big bark came at last to the dreary waters westward of Cape Horn. And there at last she found wind instead of mere breezes.

There was no more wiping or polishing, no more chipping rust. Tomkins and his comrades took their places on the deck, in battle with the roaring westerlies. Day after day the wind howled. And lucky it was for the big slow bark that it did howl. For Von Spee's cruisers, having vanquished Admiral Craddock's fleet off Coronel, were in hiding amidst the islands to the northward; in readiness to slip out and scour the seas for allied commerce at the first lull in the gales.

While *Lyderhorn* rolled on into the Atlantic, Wally Brown and Gilbert Cutting raved day after day at the eight German sailors; for they, it seemed, had lost all interest in their labors; had become afflicted with some mysterious disease that quite precluded hurry. For all the raving of the mates, for all the gibes of the apprentices, they were never the first aloft. Moreover, it often happened that when they had furled a sail it shortly afterward worked loose, so that dagoes or boys had to go aloft to restow it. One might have supposed that they had a grudge against the bark.

Aware that the best men of his crew were become slackers, George Gwilliam ordered their allowances of grub cut down. That did not cure, did not even improve them. For them to rob the dagoes, Johnnie Crapeau, and the negro was a simple matter; and the robbed, and not they, went hungry.

On a shrieking, wind blasted evening when the Germans' food allowance had been cut to a bare minimum, the dagoes, Johnnie Crapeau, and Joseph at last went aft to seek justice. They were half starved, shivering, sea soaked. Blood and bone were chill.

"Monsieur Mate! Monsieur Mate!" cried the little Frenchman from the sea swept quarterdeck, to Wally Brown on the more or less dry poop above. "Zose peegs—zose peegs—"

Wind drowned his voice. Hissing sprays whipped over him.

"Zose peegs—" he began again, and a grayback rolled over the bulwarks, knocked him down, bowled him into the rushing scuppers, and half drowned him. Wally shook with merriment as dagoes and negro followed the furious little Frenchman back toward the focsle.

In the shelter of the midship deck house Johnnie Crapeau turned. Hating every one on earth, and everything, he leaped for the nearest dago, and clawing at one another they rolled together into the bubbling scuppers. Five of his comrades at his heels, Tomkins ran out to see the fun.

Their big one cheering to the dago, the Germans came streaming from the focsle.

Cowed by a sudden blackness of the windward sky, dagoes, Frenchman and negro clung in the rigging while, with *Lyderhorn* surging through a roaring sea, fists and belaying pins flew.

As Wally Brown and Gilbert Cutting came forward on the run, a fierce squall beat the wallowing bark. There was no time for discussion of any sort.

"Get the fore topsail off her!" ordered Wally Brown.

"All hands! Fore topsail down-haul!" shouted Gilbert Cutting.

The second mate's men, the eight apprentices, made for the rigging. But the eight Germans went as one man to the focsle.

"You here! Get out!" bellowed Wally at the focsle door.

The big blue eyed, blond man looked steadily at Wally and slowly shook his head. The seven shook their heads.

"Refusing duty, are ye?" asked Wally. And none of the eight made any move or answer.

The mate hurried to old George Gwilliam on his poop. Pistols in their hands, skipper and mate went forward together.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the skipper, knee deep in swirling water without the focsle door; and had for answer only gloomy stares.

Pistol in hand, the skipper waited while Wally Brown went aft for handcuffs. While Gilbert Cutting saw to the furling of the topsail, Wally ironed the wrists of the Germans. As they went to the sail locker hatch beneath which they were to be imprisoned he took the knives from their belts. And as Wally shut the hatch upon them those eight German sailors broke into song. It was "all Dutch" to Wally.

The squall eased. The windward sky opened clear. Gilbert Cutting followed old George Gwilliam and Wally to the poop. And in their focsle the dagoes muttered together. They were hungry. And now, with the mate's men locked up, would be harder work than ever. Very well! They would not work. The ship might rot for all of them. They had been made to work on every saint's day. Now they would not work at all. Joseph shuddered as he heard them. But Johnnie Crapeau sat on the sail room hatch and called down insults to his tormentors.

That work would be far harder than ever did not trouble the apprentices at all. They hoped the dagoes would refuse duty too. Then it would be up to them to bring the old hooker to port. They could do it! They never for a moment doubted that they could do it. Good old skipper! Good old Wally Brown! Good old Cutting!

"Have ye had fightin' enough, boys?" laughed Chips, looking in on them.

But the wind was lulling, and before a boy could answer the shouting of the mates brought them all to the deck again. Somehow, with only Frenchman and negro to help them, they shook out the fore topsail and hoisted it again. Not till the heavy sail was stretched did Wally Brown report to his skipper that the dagoes too were refusing duty.

"Lock 'em up!" ordered the skipper.

Alone, belaying pin in hand, Wally herded the dagoes below, into the sail room with the Germans. But he did not iron them. For one thing, there were no more irons. And for another he did not consider them worth the trouble of ironing.

During the night the wind fell. The apprentices sang and shouted as they piled full sail upon the bark. By dawn the weather was hazy, the breeze very light; *Lyderhorn* to the southwest of the Falklands, and scarcely moving. Now and again from beneath the sail room hatch there came the noisy chorus of a German song.

HISTORY records that while the battle of the Falkland Islands was at its height, while Von Spee's cruisers were running from Admiral Sturdee's great ships, there emerged, far away, under full sail from the haze, a lofty bark. She appeared suddenly, as though arisen from the sea. Then, as she had come, she vanished. Mists engulfed her.

"It's not thunder! What the devil is it?' exclaimed Tomkins, as he stepped to the deck just after breakfast on a misty morning.

While skipper and mates gazed from the poop, while apprentices, Frenchman, and negro, gazed from the main deck, all mystified and none of them dreaming of war, there swept from the haze a long gray hull with tall, smoke belching funnels. A wild cheer rose from the apprentices as swift on her flying heels there raced another thundering shape.

Old George Gwilliam turned to Wally Brown.

"Mister," said he, "it's the day!"

Tomkins darted into the half deck. When in a moment he returned his old dungarees were gone and in their place he wore the uniform of a midshipman of the reserve.

"Who d'ye think you're goin' to eat?" laughed the old carpenter.

Ignoring Chips, the eldest apprentice went to the poop and to his skipper. The fighting ships were lost in the eastward haze.

"What is it, boy?" asked old George Gwilliam.

"The day, sir," answered Tomkins.

"We're but an old merchantman, lad," said the skipper. "We've no part in it."

"May I get those rifles up, sir?" asked Tomkins.

His brows screwed up, half in amusement, half in serious thought, the old man looked at his apprentice's eager face.

"Aye. Get 'em up," said he, and when the boy was gone turned to his mates. "D'ye mind the day we saw yon German steamer south of Pitcairn? That's what's been the matter with your watch, Brown. They've known it all along. Ye'd best go see they're safely ironed."

As Wally came to the sail room hatch there rose a spintering of wood. The Germans swarmed to the deck. At their heels came the dagoes. Shoved aside, Wally stumbled and fell. The Germans ran on. The dagoes stayed to kick him. Bruised and bloody, he rose and grasped a belaying pin from the rail. As rabbits drop into their burrows, they vanished down the hatch again.

Beside the midship house the mate paused to help Gilbert Cutting to his feet. Chips stepped from his shop, and looked along the deck. The Germans were at the foot of the poop ladder. Alone upon his poop was old George Gwilliam. There was no apprentice to be seen. All were in the saloon, where Tomkins was passing rifles out. At the moment that he heard Wally Brown shouting to him he heard the tramp of heavy feet, the sound of excited guttural voices, on the poop ladder.

By the time that the mates and carpenter arrived on the poop eight Germans were lined up, their hands above their heads.

A little man with flashing eyes sprang up the ladder after the carpenter, in each hand a belaying pin. He was singing at the top of his voice—

"*Aux armes, citoyens!*"

His eyes bulging from his head, Joseph let go the wheel spokes and without waiting to go down the ladder made the distance in one jump. Running forward to find a safe hiding place, he came face to face with the dagoes, stopped in his tracks, and uttered a wail of terror. A peal of laughter rang from the apprentices.

While the apprentices watched the Germans, the mates and carpenter disarmed the dagoes and herded them forward. When they presently reappeared they carried a heavy mooring chain. They carried it to the poop, where the carpenter shackled eight pairs of German wrists to it.

"Back to the sail locker with 'em," ordered the skipper, and turned to the dagoes.

Seeing that the game was up, the dagoes promptly decided that they had all and more than they wanted of hard bread and water, of being imprisoned in the darkness below decks. They'd work! Certainly they'd work. "*Si, si, Signor Capitan!*"

There was no more of wiping or polishing for the apprentices now. Left to themselves except when it became necessary to handle sails, they walked the deck contentedly; or, each armed with a Martini, were drilled by Tomkins; while skipper, mates and carpenter looked amusedly on. The dagoes wiped and polished as though the bark had ever been their pride. And tucking a splice here and there, Johnnie Crapeau sang to himself. And Joseph, shuddering, wondered what was to be the end of it all.

In the middle of a dark squally night an apprentice paused by the sail room hatch. In a few moments he was running to the poop. And having listened to what he had to say, Wally Brown called the skipper on deck.

When skipper, mates and carpenter arrived in the sail room there was complete silence there; silence, that is, to any ears but ears well used to the usual sounds of a ship. Outstretched on the spare sails, eight German sailors lay seemingly fast asleep.

Seeking the meaning of a sound of fast trickling water, Chips held his lantern high.

"The blasted weasels," ejaculated Wally Brown.

Through a small jagged hole in one of the plates a steady stream of water was flowing into the sail room and on to the hold below. While Chips prepared to plug the hole, Wally Brown kicked the nearest German. He woke with a start, sat up, and stared blinking at the light. One by one as Wally kicked them they sat up and blinked at the light.

"Innocent as blasted babies," grunted the mate, and sought the tool whereby they'd made that jagged hole.

Up the leg of the big man's dungarees he found an old iron rust chisel.

For the rest of that night an apprentice was left to keep watch in the sail room. When day came the skipper ordered the prisoners released from their chain and locked in their focsle.

Thoughtfully sitting in his cabin, or pacing his poop, old Skipper Gwilliam pondered on the behavior of the men of the mate's watch. Perhaps, if in a German ship, his own countrymen might have behaved in much the same fashion.

"Those fellows are all right," said he to himself. "They'll be asking to be allowed to turn to pretty soon."

For he was quite sure that the war was long ago over. Victoriously over. The fight off the Flaklands had without any doubt at all been the end of it.

Skipper Gwilliam ordered the prisoner's food increased to the usual allowance. And handing his mate a package of tobacco, he said—

"See that those men have some smoking, mister."

When Wally put his arm in at a focsle port and dropped the tobacco on their table the Germans looked from one to another with solemn eyes.

"Ve got to obey der orders," muttered the big man. "Ve got to obey der orders."

"Mister Brown," said the skipper, "have the boys bring those rifles aft. There's been enough monkey business."

Very regretfully, the apprentices returned the rifles to their rack.

The sea was empty, *Lyderhorn* alone. A long slow passage with continual light winds. Ah, well! She'd be home after a while. And waiting on the road by Momouth was a little farm. Alderney cows. Black pigs. Speckled hens.

"MISTER MATE," called the big man to Wally one fine morning.

"Well, what is it boys?"

"Ve likes to turn to now, sir."

"Now we'll maybe be able to get the old hooker along for home," said Wally. But when no mate and no apprentice was in sight the big man whispered to his comrades.

Once more *Lyderhorn* was a peaceful ship. If now and then a dago grumbled at having to work on a saint's day, no one paid any attention. The Germans worked as they had worked ere ever Pitcairn was sighted. And, warned by Wally, no apprentice longer dared to seek a quarrel with them. No apprentice very much cared to do so anyway: for, war being victoriously over, they felt half sorry for the squareheads. Only once in a while the Belgian boy ventured a sneer. Gilbert Cutting put a stop to that.

"You damn' little Dutchie, you ain't but a furriner yourself! Cut it out!"

How was a man to give his mind to longitude by chronometer problems if there was to be any more monkey business? So muttering to himself, "Zese peoples forget too queek," the Belgian boy subsided.

And so by and by the big bark came up out of the trade wind seas into the regions of Sargasso weed, and, with a southwest wind filling her great sails, sailed with the warm Gulf Stream waters all about her, and long amber garlands of the weed parting at her bluff bow. And so she came to the northwestward of the Azores, and sighted, one somber cloudy evening, one of those islands. That evening the southwest wind died, and old George Gwilliam watched his barometer.

And soon a hard northwest squall burst on the bark and all hands were called out to shorten sail in a hurry. Before four bells, at ten o'clock, the mountains of the western ocean were flinging tons of water all across her decks. And all the time that sail was being taken in the German sailors led the way; so that, though caught of a sudden by a furious squall, not a rope was lost and not a cloth of canvas.

"Those fellows are a fine lot," said old George Gwilliam.

Wally Brown agreed. And so did Gilbert Cutting. Even Tomkins himself admitted that if only they were not squareheads they'd be dandy fine sailors. And if the big blond man went from one to another of his comrades as they labored in the darkness on the racking spars and told his plan none but they saw or heard him. Sea upon sea thundered over the bulwarks. Spray on spray threshed the topsail leeches.

It was a little after midnight when the big man beckoned to his fellows and stepped from the focsle to the water swamped deck. The wind was an unintermittent roar.

Having bidden his fellows await his return, the big man proceeded cautiously aft to reconnoiter. Peering through the misty closed ports of the half deck, he saw the mate's apprentices, their tired arms on the table, their drowsy heads on their arms. Seeking the whereabouts of the mate, he crept up the poop ladder. The mate was at the helmsman's side. He could just discern Wally's dim form at the outer edge of the compass light, that shone upon the face of Tomkins steering. Since there was no light in the chart room the skipper must be below.

Enveloped in a blackness impenetrable, the big man returned to his comrades. Though the sea tore at his legs, swirled to his waist, and at times sucked almost to his shoulders, he proceeded easily; hands on the lifeline, feet firm on the steep pitch of the deck.

Once again the big man went aft, and this time his comrades accompanied him. Once more he peered through a half deck port, making sure that the apprentices yet slept. A few moments, and he had passed half deck, carpenter's shop and cook's galley, and stood with a hand on the door of the lamp locker at the after end of the midship house. There he turned and, his lips to the ear of the man next him, shouted. The man next to him turned and shouted to another. Water swirling about them, the seven gathered close about the lamp room door.

The big man was in the lamp room, a marlinespike in one hand, a lighted match taken from a waterproof box in the other. The light of the one match gave him all the knowledge he needed. Anchor lanterns swaying from hooks about his head interested him not at all. Wooden cases chocked in cleats upon the deck interested him much. To pry one open, take out two five gallon cans of kerosene, and pass them out to the man at the door, was the work of a moment. That done, he waited: waited for long enough to enable his fellows to convey those two cans to the top of the forward deck house. When the door of the lamp room opened and a hand reached in he passed out two more five gallon cans. And thus, in the space of perhaps half an hour, ten cans of kerosene were carried from the lamp room to the top of the deck house. Having passed out the last can, the big man nailed down the lids of the emptied cases, returned to the deck, and made his way to the top of the house, where his fellows bided his coming.

There was a skylight on the top of the fore deck house. Beneath the skylight was a ventilator shaft. For the big man to cast off the canvas cover of the skylight, to open the skylight and to lower himself into the shaft was the work of a moment. And, with the help of an iron belaying pin and a marlinespike, to force the grating at the bottom of the shaft was quite simple. It was pitch dark in the shaft, darker if possible than on the top of the deck house. But all sailors are used to working in the dark.

The big man stood upon the lumber in the between decks hold. To his upreaching hands there came, one by one, ten five gallon cans of oil.

The big man worked very swiftly, for at any minute the mate might come forward on a round of inspection. In a few minutes fifty gallons of oil were spread over lumber and barley. In a few minutes ten empty cans were tossed to the sea. In a few minutes eight blue eyed sailors, water dripping from their shiny oilskins, sat innocently playing a game of cards in the focsle.

"LORD, what a blow!" growled Wally Brown upon the poop. Leaning against the wind, leaving the comparative security of the poop for the floods of the main deck, he descended to make a round of inspection.

He was but starting on his forward way when something, it might he thought have been a piece of planking, struck him so heavily that he was winded, knocked from his feet and swept into the rushing scuppers. Somehow he regained his feet and wind, and somehow contrived to grasp a swaying rope and swing himself to the safety of the boat skids above. In another moment he was back on the poop, speaking down the tube to the skipper's cabin.

"Blowing very hard, sir," reported Wally, and added, "The port lifeboat's been carried away."

Well, a boat more or less did not matter so very much. There were two more like her; one on the skids of the opposite side of the quarterdeck, and one on the top of the forward deck house. But just the same, it might be well to pass some extra lashings about that other quarter boat. Wally Brown made his way to the half deck.

"Tumble out here, you! Get some extra lashing round that starboard quarterboat! The port boat's gone. And look out you hold on good, damn you! And what d'ye mean, sleeping in your watch on deck anyway?"

"Wonder if them squareheads is all asleep too," thought Wally, and made his way to the focsle and looked in at a port.

No. The Germans were all wide awake and playing cards. And he could tell by the looks of their oilskins that they had not very long ago been out on deck. The squareheads were all right! Let them blasted apprentices get out and lash down the boat. No sense in bothering good men.

When Wally came back to the poop the apprentices were there waiting for him.

"The starboard boat's gone too?" Thunder, what a blow! Both gone without his having heard a sound! Well, the loss of the quarterboats did not matter so very much. The old hooker would soon be home now. And anyway the big boat on top of the forward house could hold all hands if need be.

"You blasted boys see that you keep awake," ordered Wally.

So the apprentices went back to their half deck, put their arms on the table, their heads on their arms, and took another snooze, just as Wally had known that they would.

A few minutes before four of the morning, when by rights Wally and his watch should have gone off duty, the fury of the gale increased. Gilbert Cutting stepped from his room to a quarterdeck waist deep; and as he scrambled along a lifeline there came to him a thought that he would like to have the board of trade examiners there on that wind blasted deck. Perhaps then they would realize that it took more than mere figures to fit a man for a mate's ticket.

Fresh from snug bunks, the dagoes came sleepy from the focsle; and, instantly blown very wide awake, turned and crowded back into it. For just at that instant the fore topsail blew clean out of its bolt ropes with a report like the report of a cannon. And then as a cold white disc of a moon swung up from the wind ragged clouds, Germans, apprentices, Frenchman and negro were fighting their way up the rigging to save what was left of the sail and Wally Brown was yelling:

"Where's them blasted dagoes? All hands aloft!"

Then he was dragging them out, kicking them out, fisting them out, and they were feeling for their knives of course. But he'd chucked their knives over the side long ago. And, after all, the dagoes might as well have been left below: for all they did now was to cling to the lifelines and prate to their saints. And as, now to their knees, to their waists, now shoulder deep, in rushing water, beaten by yelling squalls and hissing spray, the rest of the crew toiled till daylight. Wally Brown and Gilbert Cutting, working with them, swore that they were all of them cracking fine sailors. It was full daylight when a new topsail was set at last. The wind was lulling by then. And setting it they sang; the big blond German leading their singing.

And, after the way with many sea chanteys, the big man's singing had a slow mournful swing to it. Somehow that great blue eyed sailor made his singing seem a dirge in that cold dawning; so much like a dirge that Tomkins cried:

"Hey, big Dutchie! Can't you be cheerfuler? She's homeward bound, squarehead!" And Wally Brown, turning to Gilbert Cutting, asked—

"Whose funeral is it, Gil?"

After the sail was set and the Germans were back in the focsle the big man looked from one to another of his comrades,

"After der blow coom der fine vedder," said he. "Ve obey der orders."

All looked solemnly at one another and were silent, for all had seen that both the quarterboats were gone. And all that day they seemed so doleful, were so oddly silent, that the apprentices, dog weary themselves but pretending that no such thing as weariness existed, laughed at the squareheads, supposing that these strong men were tired from the gale.

By midafternoon the wind had blown out the last of its fury, and by the dog watch the bark was under full sail once more. By nightfall she was slipping along upon her course with scarce wind enough to keep her sails full, the weather very misty all about her. And after dark the weather thickened more and more, so that first all the little and later all the larger stars were hid.

Wally Brown walked contentedly up and down the poop. A very few weeks now and the old hooker would be home. And after figuring on a problem or two Gilbert Cutting turned in and went to sleep. And old George Gwilliam turned in and went to sleep too, and dozed off with a vision of sleek little Alderneys belly deep in green Welsh grasses.

The second mate's apprentices and men were asleep as soon as their heads touched their pillows, of course. And the four boys of Wally's watch drowsed, their arms on the table and their heads on their arms; all but Tomkins, whose wheel it was from eight to ten. But the men of the mate's watch stayed very wide awake, seven of them in their focsle, and the other on the lookout in the bow.

HALF past eight o'clock of a pitch dark foggy night.

The big man stepped from the focsle. Because he would be able to hear rather better so, he was bareheaded. Fog dripped on his curly yellow head. He had counted on utter darkness, but fog was a boon that he had not counted on. It would help to deaden sound.

As very slowly, very cautiously, lest he chance to meet the mate or some wakeful prowling apprentice, the big man walked aft to reconnoiter. He peeped through a closed and mist blurred half deck port and saw three apprentices asleep, their heads on the table. A few steps more, and he listened at the door, at the keyhole, of the carpenter's shop. Long snores from Chips, in his bunk just within. He proceeded to the foot of the poop ladder. Where, he wondered, was the mate. The wash of the sea he could hear, and the slow drip of fog that fell from spar and yard. But he could hear no footsteps; so the mate, he knew, was not walking the poop.

Slowly, cautiously he ascended the poop ladder, and very slowly, very cautiously, he stole a little way along the poop. Good. The mate was at the wheel talking to Tomkins. None but a very easy going mate would be talking to the man at the wheel; but then Tomkins was eldest apprentice, and even a mate can want some one to speak to when dark sea nights are long and days in sail will soon be over.

Reassured, the big man returned to those who bided his coming.

A few moments more, and seven Germans were on the top of the fore deck house.

SHE WAS a big, a heavy boat, that boat on the top of the fore deck house. Dagoes, Frenchman and negro could have pulled their arms out and never have budged her. But she began to lift, to sway a little. And in a few moments she hung clear of the bark's side and swung above the water. And in just another moment six Germans, and the man from the lookout with them, were in her and ready to lower the instant the word came.

Not a sound. Not a creak or a groan.

And now the big man was down the ventilator shaft again; and this time he closed the skylight behind him. Between his teeth were matches.

In less than thirty seconds the big man was out of the ventilator shaft, and the skylight was shut again, and its canvas cover drawn over it.

The bell clanged from the poop. Three bells. Half past nine o'clock. Another half hour and it would be the big man's turn to take the wheel. And now he jumped to the lookout man's deserted station and struck the forward bell in customary reply.

"A-l-l-l-'s well, sir!" shouted the big man. And from the poop there came the deep voice of Wally Brown, "All right!"

Total darkness. Dense fog, and never a sound. Not so much as splash or ripple as the boat took the water.

THE BELL clanging from the poop again. Four bells. Ten o'clock, and Tomkins due to be relieved at the wheel. And this time no bell replying from the focsle head. Just drip of fog, and sough of sea.

"Did ye hear that forward bell?" from Wally Brown.

"No, sir," from Tomkins.

"What's the matter with that squarehead?" muttered Wally; and after waiting a few moments longer went forward.

"You young blackguards," said Wally Brown, looking in on his three apprentices, "what d'ye mean by sleeping in your watch on deck anyway? And why the blazes don't ye trim your lamp, eh? The blasted thing's stinking." None but a very easy going mate would ever have allowed his boys to have a lamp alight during their watch on deck, anyway. "After this," added Wally, "you'll douse your glim in your watch on deck."

So an apprentice blew the lamp out, and the three of them came to the deck.

"*Sniff, sniff, sniff,*" from an apprentice. "I'll say the lamp was stinking."

"That's not our lamp," from another. "It's some dirty old trampsteaming close. We wouldn't see her lights in this cursed fog." And by that time Wally

Brown was passing the forward deck house.

A rope brushed Wally's face. A rope had no business there, swaying loose in that fashion. He grasped and gave it a pull to see what rope it was. A davit fall! It must have worked loose in the big blow. One of those fools of men ought to have coiled it up.

Wally Brown was on the focsle head, where the lookout man who had failed to strike the forward bell should be. There was no one there. In all his years at sea Wally had never before found a focsle head without a lookout man on it by night. He'd find that squarehead and he'd give him a booting.

No one in the focsle!

"Ostendorf! Furst! Meyer! Muller!" *Lyderhorn's* mate calling his watch by name. Where the blazes was the watch. And what the devil was this stink of kerosene smoke?

Wally Brown on the top of the forward deck house. The boat gone!

Wally Brown stumbling against the skylight. The skylight hot!

"All hands on deck!" roared Wally Brown, and sprang from the deck house; and dashing aft knocked over two wondering apprentices as he ran.

"All hands! All hands!" he roared; and awakened by the bellow of their chief mate's voice the second mate's apprentices were out of their bunks and on deck ere ever one of the mate's boys was in the half deck to call them.

Johnnie Crapeau was out of his bunk, shaking the dagoes and Joseph. And Chips was out, barefooted, in undershirt and drawers; sniffing oil smoke.

"Lamp room must be afire."

And when, an instant later, Gilbert Cutting was on deck, and dagoes, Frenchman, and negro were out, and all the apprentices were wondering what in the world was up, Chips was in his lamp room and had seen that some one had been tampering with his oil supply. One nail pushed not quite home in the lid of one of the cases told him all he needed telling.

Next moment Chips was on the poop, where Wally Brown was calling down the speaking tube to the skipper:

"She's afire, sir. The Germans have taken the boat and gone."

And in a flash Chips knew all about it, and in a low clear terrible voice was saying:

"They've set her afire sir. There ain't a drop of kerosene left in the lamp room."

Three parts loaded. Plenty of room for drafts. She'd burn like tinder, of course. Already a tiny tongue of flame was licking round the edge of the foreward deck house ventilator skylight. And the dagoes were dashing madly this way and that, from davit to davit, screaming, cursing, calling on their saints. And Tomkins at the wheel was saying to himself, "By God, the old hooker's afire!" And the other apprentices were asking one another where were the squareheads. And the light had dawned on Johnnie Crapeau, at whose side stood Joseph, his eyes bulging from his head.

Old George Gwilliam stood at the break of his poop, one of his mates to either side of him. The little farm on the Monmouth road was suddenly become very, very far away. And Wally Brown had altogether forgotten his old dreamings. And in as far as Gilbert Cutting was concerned such things as mate's certificates might never have been invented.

"Back the main yard and clew the courses up," ordered old George Gwilliam to his mate; and to Chips he said something about building a raft. To the second mate he said, "Take the cook and steward and that boy from the wheel, and get some stores up, mister."

And then Wally was bellowing orders. The dagoes were far and away too terrified to even hear any orders. So while they ran hither and thither and got into everyone's way, and were kicked, fisted, and cursed whenever they came within reach of Wally, the seven boys and Johnnie Crapeau, and Joseph, hauled up the foresail and mainsail and crojick and swung the great main yard aback, so that the bark came to rest and lay motionless, with a red tongue of flame leaping hungrily from the forward ventilator shaft, and another from the ventilator shaft on the top of the midship house, and wisps of smoke creeping out and round her hatches.

Then Chips, lantern in hand, was leading seven apprentices and the Frenchman and negro below, down the after hold; for the sole wood available for the making of a raft was that of the wooden stringers fastened to the between deck beams. And time was very short, for the hold was thick with smoke and the heat already well nigh unendurable. Only the Belgian boy did not go below to help wrench away stringers. He was just going below at the heels of the others when the skipper called him back and thrust a loaded Martini into his hands. The decks were alight now, lit with a ruddy flickering glow, and old George Gwilliam had seen the frantic dagoes.

"Lend the mate a hand," said old George Gwilliam, and to the mate he shouted, "Keep them men away from the quarterdeck, mister!"

While Chips and his hurrying company dragged stringers from the after hatch to the quarterdeck and commenced the building of a raft, and while the second mate, eldest apprentice, and cook and steward, brought stores from the smoky lazarette, Wally with his pistol and the Belgian boy with a Martini held the screaming dagoes back. And as the raft began to take shape Gilbert Cutting and Tomkins, driven from below by the heat and the smoke, lent a hand; while cook and steward stood helplessly by; two skinny little Chinamen who could not be of any use just then.

And bye and bye, just as the outer dark and the fog were a little dispelled by a rising moon, the raft was finished.

Old George Gwilliam looked down to his quarterdeck. Sweat streaked soot upon their faces, apprentices, carpenter, and second mate, looked up to him. It was a very inadequate affair, that raft: for what with the flame and the smoke down below there hadn't been time to save a great many stringers.

And, "Back! Back! Back!" warned Wally Brown, his pistol levelled. And, "Go vay back, *cochons!*" warned the Belgian boy.

"Get the apprentices and cook and steward and carpenter away, sir," ordered old George Gwilliam.

There was room for no more on the raft. Even those few would be almost too many, what with the little store of food and the beaker of fresh water.

The deck was very hot by now, but not too hot for Tomkins to dart past Wally Brown, through the dagoes, and into the half deck. And when in a moment he was back, his old dungarees were gone and he was garbed in the uniform of a midshipman of the reserve. And while he was gone his comrades and the second mate and carpenter contrived to get the raft over the side. But no apprentice made any move to get upon it. Neither did Chips. Only the cook and steward slid down, and took the little store of food and water.

"Apprentices and carpenter," ordered Wally Brown. "Look alive now!"

But Chips ascended the poop ladder and said something in an undertone to old George Gwilliam, who looked into his grizzled face and nodded understandingly.

"Over with you, boys!" ordered old George Gwilliam.

"Over you go, lads!" ordered Wally Brown.

"Ovaire viz, ze *garcons!*" cried Johnnie Crapeau. "Ze sheep burn vaire queek now."

Joseph stood stock still. He'd go when the word came and he'd not go till then.

It was Tomkins who stepped to the side of Wally Brown.

"Let the dagoes go, sir. They don't belong with the old hooker. We do," said the eldest apprentice.

Flame was leaping from the sail room hatch. Flame was leaping from fore and midship ventilator shafts, hungrily reaching toward flapping folds of foresail and mainsail. And the deck was almost too hot to stand upon barefoot; as the second mate's apprentices, who had been so suddenly wakened, were standing. And in a cowering group the dagoes faced pistol and Martini.

Wally Brown handed his pistol to Tomkins and ascended to his skipper's side. And as his mate repeated the eldest apprentices's words old George Gwilliam nodded understandingly.

"Mr. Cutting, get the men of your watch away, sir," ordered the skipper.

Over the side, helter skelter, shoving and crowding, went the dago sailors. But Johnnie Crapeau shook his head in Gilbert Cutting's face.

"Meestaire Cutting," said he, "*s'il vous plait!* Eeef you please, sir!" And Gilbert Cutting nodded. And no one at that moment remembered Joseph. So he stayed where he was. And the raft was gone.

THE MOON shone bright upon the western ocean, shone bright upon a boat in which were eight sturdy blue-eyed sailors; a boat with her tiny sail spread to the little breeze, the sea bubbling about her bow and sucking round her counter.

Tiller in hand, a great blond sailor stood erect; his gaze upon the lowering horizon; upon a long low line of utter darkness swiftly rising from the moaning sea rim. One winter gale just done, and now another coming! And only a ship's old fragile boat to face it in!

"Vot ve do now?" called the solemn voice of a sailor in the boat's bow.

"Aye. Vot ve do now?" whispered one and another, eyes now upon that fast oncoming line of blackness, now on the giant steersman.

And the big blond sailor answered—

"Ve have obey der orders."

And as the steersman spoke the moon went out. Darkness enfolded the waves of the western ocean, enfolded the fragile boat. Silence fell. Silence broken but by the slow flap of a tiny sail.

Silence lasted but a moment. A deep voice broke it. A ringing voice that breaking from the heart of darkness seemed as high challenge to the growing wind moan mourning from the throat of swift awakening storm.

> "*Lieb Vaterland! Magst ruhig sein!*
> *Lieb Vaterland! Magst ruhig sein;*
> *Fest steht und treu die Wacht—*"

Drowning the steersman's song, the gale arose; wild moaning, seething, screaming, thundering wind out of northwest.

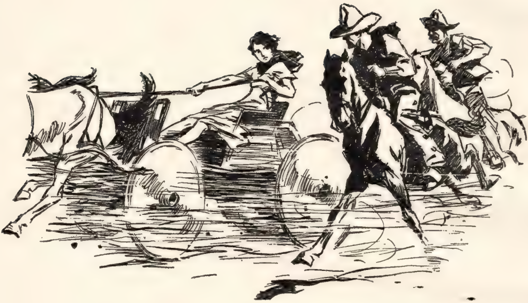
THE MOON shone bright upon a burning ship, upon a company of men and boys who gathered on her poop, close to her wheel, where smoke was thinnest. Eight young apprentice lads, an old Welsh skipper, a mate, and second mate, a grizzle browed ship carpenter, a slight black eyed man, and a Jamaica negro.

It was Tomkins who stepped to old George Gwilliam's side and spoke a low word or two. And old George Gwilliam nodded.

And Tomkins went to the chart room and came forth in a moment with a small red roll of bunting in his hand. And two other apprentices took the roll of bunting from his hand and bore it to the signal halyards, and hoisted it. And Gilbert Cutting reached above their hands and jerked the halyards. And at his jerk the roll of bunting broke wide open.

And the moon shone bright upon the ensign of the *Lyderhorn*.

And presently the moon went out. And soon after that the wind rose; wild moaning, seething, screaming, thundering wind out of the northwest. And the *Lyderhorn* was gone.



STEPHEN PAYNE

tells a story of a

MOST EFFICIENT COWBOY

NOT BEIN' eddicated much, I ain't got no highfalutin' word for what ails our boss here at the Muleshoe, but I here and now opines that young Harry Badgley, same bein' high man o' the Muleshoe, is plum' goofy in the cranium.

Why? 'Cause when our old time foreman up an' quits, Harry 'nounces as how the waddy what proves hisself the most efficient at all cowboy work—in other words, the most expert cowboy—gets the job. Now, ain't that one lully-coola of a scheme for to make a plum' happy, contented family of chap and spur wearin' humans the grouchiest, sorest headed bunch o' orrie eyed haters you ever seen? It positively is—take it from me—an elongated, lantern jawed ol'-timer what's commonly known as Salty Bush.

Young Harry inherited this ranch and l'arnt most of what he thinks he knows 'bout cows and the fellers what herds 'em, a-settin' in a desk or chair at an agricultural knowledge box and listenin' to some white collared jazbo spielin' 'bout how alfalfy and spinnach had orter be growed.

Ye-ah, and by readin' books 'bout cowboys and seein' movin' pictures of 'em. Jus' imagine! The mornin' Harry makes that 'nouncement, he says:

"Now, who's the best rider, who's the best shot, who's the best roper, who's the best bulldogger, who's the most efficient man at rescuing a maiden in distress? To such champion, all 'round, top hand cowboy goes the position of foreman."

Beautiful proposition, ain't it? He

don't want no cow foreman. What he wants is a movin' pitcher actor. Because I'm the oldest rannie on the job and knows that job had order be mine, I ventures to voice my opinion.

"Harry," says I, "them qualerfications is jake so far as they goes, but they don't cut much ice. You clean forgot to mention as how a cow foreman had orter savvy cattle and hosses, know all about how to brand said critters an' read brands on 'em. Ye-ah, know how to run a roundup and handle a trail herd an'——"

"Aw, dry up, Salty," a bull necked rannie name o' Sorrel Top cuts in.

He's wide enough atween the eyes, but he ain't very tall above 'em. He's one o' these ridin' fools, Sorrel Top is. The kind o' a bronc fighter what can put a half dollar in the bottom o' each stirrup and hold it there with his boot all the time a bronc is a-bronckin' his bronckiest.

"Here's where I gets to be foreman," says Sorrel Top. "For they ain't a waddy on the Muleshoe's payroll can pack saddles for me—not a buckin' hoss."

"That's the spirit!" shouts High Man Harry. "Salty," he continues to me, "I don't care to hear any more of your opinions. Of course I realize that, as you fellows say, you are kind of stove up, and I haven't seen you riding any bad horses lately. Nevertheless, youth must have its fling. If an old-timer can not qualify he must take a back seat."

He pauses and Hook Bronson rumbles:

"Sorrel Top, you may be able to ride, but kinda remember you've got to make a showin' at somethin' besides scratchin' hair and hide offen a sunfishin' cayuse afore you wins this yere foreman job. Now, they ain't many folks as knows jus' how good I am at shootin', at ropin' and at bulldoggin'. Harry, that job's wrapped up in a package branded with my name."

Hook's a big, raw boned, hook nosed geezer, just about as pretty as a crocodile and every bit as puny as a full growed, plum' healthy mountain lion. And, gents, take it from me, that *hombre* ain't blowin' off steam when he announces what he can do.

HOWSOEVER, Relay Dick, who's one of these trim, flaxen haired lads with a skin smoother and softer 'n that of a two months old calf, rolls him a smoke with a steady hand and says real scornful:

"I'm in on this, too. Sorrel, Hook, you two buzzards had just as well go way back and sit down."

"Uh-huh, and that goes for you, too," opines Boots Mondell, a-chewin' his tobacco thin and dribbling some of it down his gray beard. "Me," he continues, "I ain't one to brag, but I sure am one of them expert cowboys. Why, I come up the trail from Texas when I was just a yearlin'."

I says nothin', but I glares at my four side pards. There's just five of us punchers and we was a right amiable bunch, but now I notices that I's got no monopoly on the glarin' business. Strikes me right off as how the waddy what does get to be foreman of the Muleshoe ain't goin' to be loved much by the bunch he'll be foreman of. But Harry's tickled as a well fed, skim milk colt.

"Gather up some bucking horses and the wildest steers you can find," says he. "We'll stage this competition properly. Get all set to pull off the contests tomorrow, boys. I have some friends and relatives coming from the East. I'm going to town now and get them. And I'll spread the word there so we'll have a big and appreciative audience. I'd like to open this contest to all comers," he adds, "but that wouldn't be fair to you boys."

"Suits me. More the merrier," says Sorrel Top.

"And me," booms Hook Bronson.

"No," returns Harry. "Man that wins will have plenty of chances to defend his title as the most expert cowboy."

"I won't," says I, plenty grouchy, " 'cause I ain't competin'."

"What?" gasps Harry.

"Good reason why," snickers Hook.

"Ain't there, though?" drawls Sorrel, sarcastic.

"Hey, you wallopers," snorts Relay

Dick. "Cut that line out. No rubbin' it in on an old range vet. My bones ain't brittle and my muscles is limber. I'll give you geezers a run for your money."

"But, Salty," says Harry, gazin' at me scornful, "Boots is most as old as you and he's going to compete. Are you going to lie down?"

"Not prezactly," I returns. "Somebody's got to boss this monkeydoodle shindig. I'll stay with you long enough for to see as it's pulled off proper."

Harry don't seem to appreciate that, but as he don't know how to manage a rodeo—which is about what his contest is shapin' up to be—he turns the reins over to me, merely suggestin' as he'd like to put on a few new stunts. One in particular, the rescue of a beautiful lady from somethin' or other. His cousin Arabelle, who's comin', she'll be the lady.

"Every one of them four expert cowboys has got to have a stab at rescuin' her?" says I. "Be kinder tough on her, won't it?"

"Oh, she'll glory in it," says Harry, and slips me the lowdown as to why. Seems one of the guests is goin' to be the straw boss or somethin' of a movin' pitcher layout, and Arabelle wants to show that gent how she can act.

"Come nearer to catchin' him if she showed how she can cook," I opines.

Harry sighs.

"Salty, romance and you are complete strangers."

"Correct," says I. "I never met the gent. He comin', too?"

Harry don't answer. He's busy watching Hook Bronson and Boots Mondell havin' the gosh awfullest scrap you ever seen, while at the same time Relay Dick and Sorrel Top is also goin' at each other like proddy roosters. I'd told Hook and Boots to go bring in a bunch of longhorn steers and told the other two expert cowboys to round up some broncs. They'd always necked their ponies alongside each other afore this, with plenty of cheerful banter but no flyin' fists or bloodshed. But this contest business . . .

I RAMBLES down and pulls Sorrel Top offen Relay.

"Cut this, and get them broncs!" I bellers.

"I ain't ridin' with that purtty jackanapes," snorts Sorrel.

"Nor me with that two legged bull," growls Relay, boundin' to his feet and comin' at Sorrel, head down. Sorrel tries to bust loose from me, and I gives him my right paw right behind his ear, thus bustin' him proper.

" 'Tend to business an' do as I told you," I tells Relay, "or I'll slap you silly."

He sizes me up belligerent for about a minute and then goes to his hoss. Sorrel gets up, holdin' his head, and does likewise. Harry has been hoppin' round and round the two other expert cowboys what's all tangled up on the ground. Hook has got a death grip on old Boots' beard, and Boots is yellin' bloody murder.

"Salty," squeals Harry, "what'll we do?"

For answer I snatches Hook's quirt off his saddle horn and wades into them two fightin' gents. In about one second they doubles up on me. Things looks doubtful for a minute, but that quirt has a most awful useful butt end. Some two minutes later them two cowpokes gets very respectful to Salty Bush and says, "Yes, sir," as they forks their horses and rides off.

Harry looked at me kinda curious, a look I can't fathom, as he hooks up to the three seated spring wagon and pulls for town. I'm powerful busy the rest of the day a-gettin' some unefficient help rounded up for to pull off this efficiency contest at this efficiency ranch.

'BOUT sundown the cowboys what all hankers to be foremen brings in the broncs and the steers. They don't look like they'd resumed fistic hostilities, but they ain't speakin' to one another. I has never seed so much silence round our supper table. We don't eat with the dudes what Harry has brought home, though we sees 'em prognosticatin' about and investigatin' things.

Harry hunts me up to give me a knockdown to Arabelle. We can't find her, for the reason, as we later discovers, that Relay Dick has took her out ridin'. Fast worker, that younker; but havin' lamped Arabelle, I don't blame him none. She's a trim, nifty hoofed little lady with curly yellow hair and them kinda "come hither", gosh awful pretty blue eyes.

"Doggone your hide, Harry," I says, "you goin' to let that girl get in danger?"

"She won't be in danger," he returns, colorin' up like a Colorado sunset. "But," he continues, "I've changed my plans. There'll be only one rescue and I'll perform that."

"Uh?" gasps I. "That fair to your efficient cowboys?"

"Why not?" snaps Harry. "I'll not compete against them in anything else. I'd not do this except that, with Mr. Bernar Nicol here, it means so much to Arabelle. Confound that Relay Dick, anyhow!"

"Gosh!" I chuckles, thinkin', "Young Relay's chances o' becomin' foreman is mighty slim now." Then I meets a pompous little feller what appears to have ate too much all his life and worked too little, who is Mr. Bernar Nicol.

He ain't so awful old, either, and he's huntin' for Miz Arabelle, too. Which way'd she go? He's thinkin' of walkin' out to see if he can find her, when a lady what weighs about a hundred and sixty-nine on the hoof makes her appearance and suggests it's time hubby was helpin' unpack her luggage.

Strikes me as Arabelle's chances o' gettin' into the pictures is most awful good so far as Bernar is concerned, but yet most awful remote. Uh-huh. I ambles to the bunkhouse and there observes Boots Mondell and Hook Bronson separatin' their beddin' and the stuff in their mutual warbag. They ain't sayin' a word to each other, but seems to have agreed to quit bunkin' together. Sorrel Top is sortin' out his plunder from amongst that of Relay Dick. It sure is one happy family. I'm glad I didn't enter that contest, even through I won't never get to be foreman and'll have to leave the Muleshoe, for I'll be danged if I'll take orders from any one of them three grouchy rannies. Relay Dick, now, he might not be so bad.

I smokes a while, but the tobacco don't taste good and I finally moseys to the barn for to bed down—my bed bein' up in the haymow. I ain't much more'n got settled when Relay and Arabelle rides in and I hears 'em talkin'.

"Miz Arabelle," says Relay kinda husky, "I don't cotton much to this idea you've got of joinin' the movies."

"And why not?" asks she.

" 'Cause," stammers Relay.

"A woman's answer," says Arabelle.

"Mebbe," stutters Relay, "mebbe you kinda get what I mean. Course, if I was goin' to be along with you—" He hesitates.

"It means everything to me," she comes back. "Now, Dick, be nice and pull off a wonderful rescue tomorrow. You will, won't you?" she begged in that tone that melts any calf eyed young fool's heart.

I can hear Relay expel his breath.

"Oh, but won't I?" says he. "Since you ask it, dear."

"Can't see the herd for the dust," says I to me and goes to sleep.

MORNIN' comes, and to the Muleshoe ranch rides and drives folks from all the neighborhood round about, as well as folks from town. 'Mongst them from town is old Pat Hurley, a great big geezer with the biggest white hat you ever seen and the loudest voice you ever heard. He owns and runs a Wild West show, and, havin' met me afore, he informs me on the quiet that he's lookin' for buckin' hosses and also buckaroos to fork 'em.

As I'm arena manager for this here contest rodeo of young Harry Badgley's, I gives ol' Hurley a mount and takes a lotta comfort in confabbin' with him. I needs a little comfort, for I'm havin' hard work to keep the contesters from flyin' at each others' throats again this mornin'. In fact, I has to lam the tar outa Hook Bronson to make him mind me. That bronc peeler knows that Gadfly is the meanest bucker in the Muleshoe's herd of broncs, and he's bound to have that hoss regardless of any rules for drawin' of hosses. I teaches him different and the act gets a big hand from the audience.

Ol' Pat Hurley says:

"By grab, Salty, you sure know how to handle these hard boilt rannyhans. Kinda bad medicine for 'em to monkey with, you bet."

"Ye-ah," I comes back. "I can handle cattle and hosses as well as ringy rannies, but that don't get me no place with Harry Badgley. You heard what kind of a shenanigan he was pullin' off here?"

"Uh-huh," says Pat, studyin' me thoughtful. A big grin spreads over his big face. "This contest is to decide who'll be foreman, huh?"

"Uh-huh, kinda serve him right if he didn't get no foreman outa it," I spits. "Jus' bein' able to ride broncs and rope steers don' make foreman material, Hurley."

"Hell, no," agrees Hurley. "Say," he goes on, gazin' across the yard at the crowd which is bunched in rigs, on horseback and on foot, and notin' particularly young Harry, "I'll bet you four dollars to a glass of beer that if young Relay Dick wins he don't get the job. Badgley'll crawfish somehow. He's glarin' daggers at that young cowpoke."

Harry's doin' that. What has Relay done but somehow get Arabelle on to a hoss, and here he and she is a-ridin' into our arena with their hosses a-prancin' while they bows to the crowd.

"Folks," says Arabelle in her silvery voice, "right in front of you all Mr. Relay Dick is going to rescue me from the seat of a runaway buckboard."

"Whoopee!" yells the crowd.

Harry plunges outa the crowd and runs up beside Relay's hoss.

"Folks," he yowls, "there's a misunderstanding here! I'm going to perform the rescue, not Relay Dick. Get over to the corrals with the rest of those yahoos!" he barks at Relay.

Relay don't do that and his answer is cut short, for three more efficient cowboys—Sorrel Top, Hook and Boots—instanter lopes across to the girl, Relay and Harry.

"I gets a chance at this rescuin'!" bellers Hook.

"I'm the rannie what pulls off that stunt!" roars Sorrel Top.

"*Urrrr! Urrr!*" grates Boots. "Whar do I come in?"

"Behind the herd, like always," sings out Jack Denslow, a rancher who owns the biggest spread in our county. "Gal, it 'pears like you gotta be rescued no less'n five times. May the Lord pity you."

There's an incomprehensible jargon of voices all yowlin' t' onct from the cluster, and old Pat Hurley, laughin' fit to bust hisself, says to me:

"Straighten out that mix if you can. I'm sayin' it can't be did."

I LOPES across the yard.

"You four mule heads get over to the corrals and get set for the events of this contest. Looka here, Harry has made this darn fool rescuin' stunt his personal contribution to the entertainment and you wallopers ain't in on it. Savvy the burro? That goes for you, too, Relay."

"Yip, yip, yowie!" howls the crowd. "Thata boy, Salty! You tell 'em!"

Sorrel Top begins to weaken.

"Well, if Relay Dick don't get to—" he begins.

"He don't!" I yelps. "These people are waitin' for you experts to do your stuff. Let's go!"

Three of the buckaroos starts back to the corrals, but Relay Dick hesitates.

"When this is over," he tells me aside, "I'm going to bust you wide open. You're boss right now, but I'll be boss when it's over."

Arabelle, on her horse right beside me, says in a tense whisper—

"You're a nasty, mean old man."

I makes her a little bow.

"Just oblige me by keepin' back out this arena," says I; and to Relay, "Skeedaddle!"

Lopin' after him to the corrals, I booms:

"All set for the Muleshoe's ropin' contest for to determine which is the most efficient cowboy! Sorrel Top is the first roper."

"Whoop!" says the crowd.

There ain't no fence between 'em and our arena. If a steer takes a notion to, he can run right into 'em; but they's lined up on the north side of the yard and the steers is supposed to run east, bein' headed that way. East and south they's plenty of space—a thousand acre pasture.

Well, some punchers whoops outa the corral a red horned doggie what can run like an antelope, and Sorrel Top takes after the critter. That steer is so blamed fast he's pretty near outa sight o' the crowd afore Sorrel's bronc snakes up beside him. Pat Hurley with the flag, a waddy with the watch, and me to be the judge, is a-foggin' along in the dust.

Sorrel makes a good catch, all right, snarin' that critter by both front feet and bustin' it wide open. Tyin's short work for that human bull of a fella.

"Sixty-five seconds!" yells the timekeeper.

"You're a liar!" yowls Sorrel.

"Hold this watch!" bellers the timekeeper, thrustin' it at Hurley and startin' to climb off his bronc. "They ain't no man—"

"Keep your shirt on!" I interrupts. "Sorrel's disqualified 'cause he front footed his steer."

"Hey, you never laid down no rules!" Sorrel Top snorts.

"He's correct all the same," says Hurley. "I'd think an expert cowboy'd know the rules."

That silences Sorrel Top. We turns the steer loose and he disappears over the steep hill to the east.

"Relay Dick is our next roper!" announces I as we lopes back to the corral.

Blamed if Arabelle ain't rode to the corral and joined Relay. There they is settin' side by each, a-chattin' away.

Relay gets a little antelope horned roan dogie what runs straight for a little bit, then dives right for the crowd. Relay puts his rope around the little dogie's horns, picks him right outa the people's faces and lays him flat. Steer don't weigh much and Relay's hoss gets scared at the way the crowd is a-whoopin' and cheerin' Relay; so, at the same moment when Relay reaches the throwed critter, that bronc hightails it with the dogie at the end of the rope. Of all the foot racin' you ever seen, that cowboy does it; and, by jingo, he catches up to that skiddin' steer, hops aboard its carcass and hogties it.

"Time?" I yammers at our timekeeper, for the people has gone mad and is throwin' their hats in the air and whoopin'.

The gent with the watch has plum' forgot to notice the time a-tall and tells me so.

"Don't tell 'em that. Say somethin'," I orders.

"Sixty seconds!" blats the numbskull as though I wasn't havin' troubles enough at this contest rodeo.

Relay stares at the feller for a moment.

"I wasn't a second over forty," he says in a cold, hard voice.

"Forty 'tis!" bellows Hurley, glancin' at the watch, and Relay Dick smiles and waves his hat at the crowd, which comes to meet him and delays proceedings for five minutes by their congratulations. But Harry Badgley don't congratulate him. No, sir. That young man's jaw is kinda slack and, though he tries to get up beside Miz Arabelle, he can't make it.

HOOK BRONSON is scowlin' like an old pirate as he takes his place to rope. He looks like a first class cutthroat more'n ever, and he always did resemble one. I noticed the movie picture man, Bernar Nicol, a-sizin' Hook up kinda speculative and sayin' somethin' to the beefy female what won't let him get away from her side.

Hook has a double rig hull and he's cinched it so tight his hoss is kickin' up and switchin' his tail, real provoked-like. He gets a sizable black bullock with red eyes and one busted horn. T'other horn busts as the steer hits the ground at the end of Hook's rope; and as the critter's caught by the horns, that sets him free. He bounces on to all four feet just as Hook reaches him, and away he goes for the tall uncut. Hook lopes back to his bronc, which has started rollin' to get shed of the saddle. That bronc sure objects to tight cinchin'.

The crowd is jus' a-roarin'. This is the bestest fun them people has ever seen.

Hook's roar is a different kind of a roar, though, and the way he straightens that bronc out and fuzzes after his dehorned black steer is a caution to see. Sure as shootin', these Muleshoe cowboys is efficient. The black steer and Hook both goes over the steep hill out east. Me and Hurley and the timekeeper follows 'em. Hook ropes that steer round the neck and runs on him this way and that, but get the critter down he can not.

"Hook Bronson, no time!" says I as we rides back to the corral.

Harry comes a-trottin' to my side.

"Salty," he whispers miserable, "that Relay Dick—I jus' can't have him win."

"You made your own bed. Lie in it!" says I. "Boots Mondell is our next roper."

Boots, as I said, is a short gent with a grey beard. He looks like a hardy, hairy old pioneer and comes pretty near bein' one. Takin' his place behind the startin' line, he says he'll be dad blamed if he'll fumble like Hook done.

He don't, for he makes as pretty a catch as ever I seen, but he stops his hoss head-on toward the roped dogie, and over said hoss's head peels Boots' saddle with Boots in it, as that dogie hits the end of the rope. Boots and the saddle parts company a second later and Boots sets on the ground a-watchin' his hull skyhootin' across the prairie at the end of a rope fast to the horns of a rapidly travelin' bovine.

I has to catch that steer to rescue Boot's saddle.

"Ladies and gentlemen," booms Hurley in that awful big voice of his'n, "it's unnecessary to tell you that Relay Dick has won this roping contest."

That suits the people, but it don't suit the other three buckaroos. The ropin' is all Relay'll win, they opines, speakin' to each other for the first time in twenty-four hours. Don't seem to please Harry Badgley much, for what's Relay doin' but talkin' to Arabelle some more.

"These top notch cowboys is goin' to ride some broncs now!" I announces. "Relay Dick on Pinwheel!"

That good lookin' kid can ride just like he can rope. Watchin' him set old Pinwheel clean and scratch him to a finish, I decides he'll make Harry a tolerable good foreman—that is, if all a foreman's supposed to know is how to rope and ride and bulldog steers.

"That Relay boy," says old Pat Hurley to me while the assisting cowboys is saddlin' Black Heart for Sorrel Top to fork, "would be a kinda drawin' card in my show business, d'you know it?"

"Hook'd be better," I opines. "You could advertise him as the only hoss thief left unhung in Colorado."

SORREL TOP gets set on Black Heart, and that eleven hundred pound black hoss goes up among the clouds, changes ends up there and punches a hole in the earth when he comes back to it. All that does is shake Sorrel Top's hat off his sorrel noodle. That buckaroo kicks away his stirrups and scratches that volcanic bronc from shoulders to saddle skirts. His old quirt comes up and he pours it into Black Heart. Ye-ah, he rides just like a wolf—savage, rejoicin'. And goin' high, landin' hard, that black hoss bucks savage and silent.

Our audience gets up and takes notice; so does Pat Hurley.

"Salty, that *hombre's* a-ridin' son-of-a-gun. He's there jus' like a sheep tick!"

Black Heart quits after awhile. We

don't stop him nor pick him up. These efficient Muleshoe cowboys rides buckers to a finish. Sorrel Top, breathin' just a little hard, grins at Relay, and Harry Badgley looks a sight less worried.

Hook Bronson gets a snake bellied little roan cayuse what wiggles, shakes, crawls, squirms and bucks all in a spot six feet square. He never gets over two feet off the ground, but darned if the critter don't wiggle plum' out from under the saddle and Hook both after five minutes or so. Hook's so doggoned mad he can't spit as he climbs up on the corral fence.

And then what does the curly coated, old hammerhead named Uncurried do to Boots Mondell but pitch right to the edge of the crowd and send that gentleman over his head right in amongst 'em. Four men carries old Boots out and lays him down, and one of 'em says he's an undertaker and he'll measure Boots for his coffin, Boots a-cussin' and kickin' all the time.

Arabelle says to Relay—

"These people have a most peculiar sense of humor."

"Bronc bustin' contest is a tie!" says I. "Sorrel and Relay can ride it off later, if they're still alive after the bulldoggin'."

Relay bulldogs first. I has to assist each one of them buckaroos, for they ain't one of 'em as'll help the others. Boots and Hook knows they're beat, but do you think they'll help Relay or Sorrel? Not much.

Relay's a good cowboy, all right. You got to hand it to the lad. The best thing he does, and how he got his name, he ain't doin' today—that's ridin' relay races. He ain't never bulldogged much, but he downs a piebald, wide horned dogie in twenty-four seconds.

Sorrel Top sneers.

"That job's in my vest pocket."

He hoolihans a red steer in fifteen flat. Hurley and me faults the fall and makes him do it over again. Uh, but Sorrel's mad; and bein' forced to stop his steer afore he throws it, the job takes him twenty-five seconds. Harry had yowled at me to let the hoolihan stand. Now he's madder'n Sorrel is. He seems to be a little sorry that he put on this contest, but a whole lot sorrier he brought Arabelle to it. None of the spectators is sorry, though, and I'm kinda havin' a good time myself.

Hook gets a bull-horned brindle critter, and he leaps from his saddle and catches the critter fair by both horns, but that heavy animal drags old Hook over four acres afore he finally gets its nose pointin' up at the sky.

"Yuh done noble!" yells the crowd and then cheers the old-timer Boots as he gets ready. I ain't never seen Boots bulldog even a yearlin', but he's sure game to try it. However, he's a mite stiff and what's he do when he jumps for the runnin' yellow steer's head but land astraddle of the critter's neck!

Next thing I know, he's ridin' the buckin' bovine backwards while the spectators whoops. Boots falls off and, settin' up, hauls out his gun and shoots at the fleein' yellow steer. That tickles the people like nothin' else has.

Hurley and me rides to the old codger, and Hurley says—

"Boots, I'll give you a hundred a month if you'll join my show."

"Huh? You mean it? Say, you're on! But what you want me to do?"

"All you got to is burlesque the acts of the star performers—be a clown."

"Huh? Huh? Me a clown? I won't—You said a hundred a month, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Clown or not, I'm goin'. I wouldn't work under nobody on this ranch 'less it was Salty, nohow."

HARRY comes a-pantin' up in time to hear this conversation.

"Boots, you ain't leavin' me?"

"You're damn' right I am."

Harry sighs.

"Lord, Salty, this business isn't coming out right at all."

" 'Spect it to?"

"Of course. Why not? Can't you decide against Relay on that bucking?"

"Nope," grim. "Him and Sorrel rides right now." I looks up to see that Mr. Bernar Nicol has joined us.

"My good man," says he to Boots, "will you sign a contract at fifty a week to act for the motion picture company which I represent?"

"Huh? Huh?", gasps Boots. "Why, I got me a job. This here dad blamed fool rodeo has been the makings of me!" whoops Boots, and his eyes, restin' on Hurley, is brimmin' with gratitude.

Nicol read a lot from that look, scowls, and goes a-patterin' towards Hook Bronson. Hurley sees what Nicol is up to, and he spurs his hoss, a-headin' for Sorrel Top. I follows slower and when I gets near Hook and Nicol I see old Hook throw his hat in the air and do a few jig steps. I hears him say:

"And, Mr. Nicol, you want me to be the ruthless cattle rustler and the outlaw chief and them kind o' things? That'll sure be jake with me. Jus' what I was cut out for. Whoop-te-do! You know, I wouldn't work here at the Muleshoe under none of these waddies, 'less it was old Salty, nohow."

Harry is comin' to find out what's up and I moseys on to Hurley and Sorrel Top.

"Fifty a week," Hurley's sayin', "and only two horses a day—straight exhibition riding, and I'll feature you as champion of the world, Sorrel. I can get away with that, all right. What say?"

"What say? Why you're a plum' life saver for me, Hurley. Ye-ah, 'cause we've drawed for hosses to ride off this tie, me and that danged lucky Relay Dick, and he's done drawed Gadfly. That lets me out. They ain't another Muleshoe hoss as bad as Gadfly, and Relay can ride 'im. Doggone, he'll be foreman. I wouldn't work under him, wouldn't work under none o' these birds, 'less it was old Salty. That hard boiled old pill's white and knows his eggs. Hurley, you bet I'm on."

I looks around and pricks up my ears. Harry's saying to Hook Bronson—

"Do you mean you're leaving me?"

"Yep."

"So'm I!" bellers Sorrel Top.

Hurley is peerin' around like he's seekin' somebody. So is Bernar Nicol. I has a hunch who 'tis—Relay Dick. Him and Arabelle is over 'mongst the crowd, which is gettin' restless for somethin' to take place.

"How about that there rescue of the lady?" half a dozen want to know all at once.

"Buckboard and team is ready!" yells I, thinkin' Relay Dick won't have no men to boss and he'll be foreman with the owner hatin' him like poison.

But both Hurley and Nicol are lookin' for him, they sure are.

Arabelle speaks up.

"We'll call the rescue off, because—well, because Mr. Badgley is no cowboy and I hardly think—"

She pauses and Jack Denslow, the big rancher, finishes:

"You don't think he could cut the mustard, hey? Well, say now, young woman, us people wants to see that rescue and you've got to show that movin' picture man what you can do. Are you going to welsh on us?"

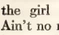
There's a mutter from the crowd which indicates it don't want that to happen, don't want to be cheated out of the thriller of the day. I lopes over.

"Miz Arabelle, as boss of these yere ceremonies, I suggests that Harry Badgley and Relay Dick lines up side by each on their broncs; and when I gives the word, as the runaway team gets goin', they both light out after you lickety blinders, and one of 'em's sure bound to rescue you."

That meets with the approval of everybody, even of Harry. Him and Relay gazes at each other like a couple of strange dogs, as they lines up on their ponies. Some hands fetches out the team and the buckboard. Arabelle sets in it, holdin' the lines like they was somethin' hot and dangerous. A cowpuncher touches off the team and away it goes. Runnin', too, is what I mean. That old buckboard is just a-sizzin'. The people is so silent you could hear a cigaret paper fall.

"Go!" I yells at Harry and Relay.

They goes. Harry's got the best hoss. He draws right up on the buckboard with the girl a-clingin' to it for dear life. Ain't no mistake about that. This stunt is beyond a joke. Nicol's eyes is saucers and his fat wife's is bigger. Boots has swallered his tobacco. I goes a-kitin' in the wake of the chase. Harry races beside the flyin', rattlin' rig. Relay, lashin' his bronc, is right behind.



HARRY jumps, misses the doggoned buckboard altogether, rolls over 'bout forty-'leven times, and, passin' him, I don't see whether he gets up. That team is gettin' powerful close to the edge of that steep hill, and Relay's hoss ain't gainin' an inch. I zips up beside him. I ought to rescue that poor scared girl, but Relay's a better man than me and far younger. Also, he's a relay race rider.

"On to my bronc!" I yelps, and leaves my saddle as I yelps.

I lands on my feet, but goes a-rollin' and, straightenin' up, sees Relay on my hoss—talk about a lightnin' change!

Up to the buckboard he scoots. 'Way out from the hoss he leans, and the girl has sense enough to get to her feet. Relay Dick snakes that girl from that rig just one second afore team and rig vanishes over the bluff. And Relay Dick comes ridin' back to the cheerin' people with her in his arms.

But as he passes me he pauses a moment.

"Salty, I'm forgettin' what I said afore this fool rodeo. You're the whitest old longhorn what ever saved the day for a darned fool cowboy."

Jack Denslow comes a-runnin' up to me.

"Salty, ten thousand cattle I got. Will you take the job of range foreman at a hundred and fifty?"

Range foreman for Denslow at a hundred and fifty a month! The idea kinda staggers me, so I'm speechless. We goes walkin' towards the crowd surroundin' Relay, the hero, and Denslow continues:

"I've seen your work on the range, Salty; but the way you handled this contest and manged those orrie eyed buckaroos opened my eyes. What are you sayin'?"

Still I don't answer and we reaches the crowd. Hurley is tryin' to get to Relay, and so is Bernar Nicol. Nicol succeeds.

"I'm offering you and the lady both contracts to act in front of the camera at figures that'll open your eyes!" he shouts.

"We'll take you up," sings out Arabelle, who's kinda white and red by turns, but not hurt none.

"Yip! Yip! Yowie!" yells the crowd and boosts both the girl and Relay to their shoulders.

I'm beside Pat Hurley and he says gruff:

"Humph, that picture jasper beat me to that pair. I wanted 'em both. Oh, hello, Salty, you pulled off some exhibition yourself, but you ain't gettin' no credit. Say, how'd fifty a week as arena manager for my show strike you?"

"Kinda strikes me dumb," I articulates.

"Yes, or no?"

"Gimme time."

"All right." Hurley turns to Harry Badgley, whose young face is sure a study in mixed emotions. He's glad Relay ain't goin' to stay and demand the foreman job, and yet he's put out and everything else all t'onct. He made a clown of himself tryin' to rescue Arabelle and he knows it, knows he's lost her—if he ever had her.

"Badgley, I want to buy twenty head of buckin' hosses," says Hurley. "How much a head?"

"Uh? I don't really know," begins Harry.

"A hundred and fifty per head if you take twenty," I cuts in. "Two hundred a head if you only want two, three or ten."

"Hey, I was dealin' with Badgley," grumbles Hurley. "How come you're hornin' in?"

"I'm still workin' for him, and so long as I am I'll try to keep him from goin' busted. Talk to me, Hurley, if you want to buy broncs."

"Yes, by all means," stammers Harry, and manages to grin rueful. "Salty won't be working for me long, I guess. My rodeo seems to have lost me every cowboy I had."

"HARRY," says I, "the trouble is these buckaroos is just too damned efficient. They didn't know it till you pulled off this rodeo and showed 'em how they was all grandstand performers and picture actors, and now not a one of em'll stay on a ranch and do the work a cowboy's supposed to do, which includes a heap of things other than bulldoggin' steers, ropin' 'em and forkin' bad broncs."

"Don't it, though?" says Harry, and shakes his head dubious.

The show is over and the people are all leaving. They're taking Arabelle, Relay Dick, Hook Bronson, Nicols and his better half with 'em, too. But Arabelle comes to the corral to bid me goodby. Her eyes is shinin' like stars. Hook follows her.

"Salty, you done noble," says he, squeezin' my hand. "S'long, ol' hoss, you'll see me on the silver screen!"

I cuts out twenty head of broncs, Gadfly, Pinwheel and Black Heart among 'em, for Hurley. Boots Mondell and Sorrel Top says goodby to me mighty friendly and starts drivin' away them broncs with Hurley, who pauses to say—

"Comin', Salty?"

I hands Hurley's check for the hosses to Harry, who's the only man left on the ranch except Jack Denslow. Jack's in a buckboard waitin' for me to get up beside him. But I looks around at the Muleshoe. Six years have I been on it. Can you blame me if I'm kinda wedded to it? Then I looks at Harry, the mournfulest dejected geezer what ever tried to smile and act game.

"Well, Salty," he says, holdin' out his hand while a s'picious little trickle of moisture forms at the corners of his eyes, "as you said, the waddies were just too efficient. After what's happened—the way I suggested you decide against Relay in the bucking, I'm darned sorry for that—I can't ask you—"

He pauses. Hurley's waitin'. Jack Denslow's waitin'. I'm thinkin' with a lump in my throat. A hundred and fifty a month from him as range foreman with ten thousand cattle to look after! Fifty a week from Hurley as arena manager, with a glorious, glamorous Wild West show.

The Muleshoe foreman never did get over seventy-five a month, but—

"Harry, don't you figger we'd better hunt up some inefficient waddies what can brand calves, though, and start the calf roundup 'bout day after tomorrow?" says I.

"You mean—" he gasps, relief floodin' his face as a rainstorm floods a mountain.

I nods.

"If you want me," I whispers husky.

"Aw, hell," grunts Jack Denslow. "I might 'a' knowed old Salty was branded with the Muleshoe. Ged-up, Dan, Babe."

"S'long," sings out Pat Hurley. "But Salty, I don't blame you, not a damned bit."

Me and Harry sets in the dust by the corral. Jus' settin' silent, sayin' nothin'. After awhile I speaks—

"Harry."

"Yes."

"She wouldn't 'a' made no rancher's wife, nohow. Wild West Show crazy and movie pitcher mad."

"I realize it," he returns. "Still it hurts. I planned everything so darned different. But, after all, I have to remember she's my cousin and I shouldn't have entertained such thoughts as I was entertaining." A pause, then, "Salty, do you sp'ose you can ever teach me this business? You're by long odds the most efficient cowboy of them all."

THE TAO

By C. A. FREEMAN

CASUAL visitors to the Philippines usually form a wrong impression of the *tao*, or peasant of the islands. They motor past his bamboo *bahay* at 11 A. M. and find him sprawled on the floor fast asleep.

"He's lazy," they decide immediately, but they do not know that the barefoot brown man was toiling with his long horned water buffalo in the rice fields an hour before dawn in order that the animal might enjoy its period of soaking during the heat of the day.

American soldiers of the Insurrection period found the *tao* a gallant, clever enemy, who if he had but little idea of civilized warfare, could and did fight like a demon when aroused, and who did not always run when the avenging bayonets came close.

Those of the 8th Army Corps who took part in the great northern advances in Luzon, can tell of *taos*, who, in small groups opposed American progress, remaining hidden in bamboo clumps and defied with their rifles the bursting shells of field guns. Pitiful groups of dead these misguided peasants formed; half clad boys with a few cartridges and a scanty meal of rice and fish wrapped in a banana leaf lying by their sides.

Today the *tao* is but little changed, despite the inroads of civilization. Credulous, easily aroused, and easily placated, he is often the victim of scheming politicians. If he does not toil constantly, who can blame him? His wants are few. With his bolo he can construct a house of bamboo, rattan and palm leaves, and twenty-seven days work a year in the rice fields will support him and his family.

He is intensely superstitious. Witchcraft and its practises are part and parcel of his being. Often in a frenzy of rage or fear, he butchers a neighbor suspected of being a *mankukulam*, or witch, and falls foul of the alert constabulary for so doing. But he loves his children and will sacrifice much to give them an education.

No man can be more hospitable than the Filipino *tao*. He will open his house to the stranger who taps on the bamboo *pinto* at midnight, cook him a meal of rice and offer him his best sleeping mat. He will accept no payment.

His ideas as to *independencia* are hazy, so he shouts for an immediate separation from the United States. The *politicos* have told him that independence will bring him a white collar and a government job and he believes it. Naturally any man likes to see his country free, but the *tao* will naively tell you that Uncle Sam will lend the Philippines enough money to run the government after the Islands are freed. The matter of payment never enters his mind.

Lovable to a great degree is the Filipino *tao*, and if handled with the right sort of firmness by Americans, he becomes an efficient workman. To those he has known for years he is a loyal friend.

Juan de la Cruz, as the *tao* is known, and *Ailine Maria* his wife, do not thrive in the atmosphere of cities. Their habitat is the country—the rice fields, the forests, the rivers and the mountains. City dwellers jeer at them, the *taga-bundok*, or ignorant peasants, but they are the veritable backbone of the Philippines. They produce, and are not parasitical. In remote districts their children still kiss their elders' hands before retiring for the night, after having squatted for an hour on the floor listening to tales of the *tikbalang*, the *asuang*, the *tjanuk* and other malignant fairies.

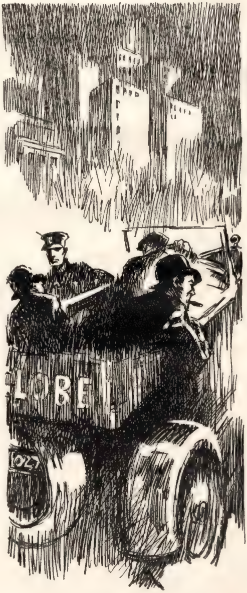
When the biggest story in a decade

A NOVELETTE OF THE NEWSPAPERMEN

DEADLINE

by

HENRY LACOSSITT



IT WAS the biggest story to break in The Town for a decade. Even the oldest members of the press admitted it. Not that murder in itself was big news particularly; you usually put a twenty-four point head on ordinary murder, plastered art somewhere near, numbered the art as the such and suchth victim of the year, and sent it to bed comfortably beneath the banner—but this story was hot for several reasons.

First, it was committed within three blocks of Central Police headquarters; second, it was committed on the High Level Bridge, the busiest thoroughfare in town, and the main artery of traffic between the east and west sides of The Town; third, the victims were two of the most prominent—socially and financially—men in the city; fourth, the men who did Arnold Fly and Joseph Stanner to death were members of Tony Garotta's gang, and it was rumored that Tony himself had been present. This last, however, had not been confirmed.

Here is how it happened:

Arnold Fly and Joseph Stanner ate dinner at the Cuyahoga Club on Euclid Avenue. At eight o'clock they called for Stanner's car, in which they had driven from their offices to the club. The car, a sedan, arrived; they left the Cuyahoga and, with Stanner at the wheel, drove over Superior Avenue to the Public Square, where a traffic policeman, waving the

breaks—with the

AT DAWN

traffic east-west, spoke to them. That was at fifteen minutes after eight.

Proceeding up Superior, they came to the High Level Bridge. Traffic was normal to heavy. Midway across the bridge, they were crowded by a big Packard limousine. This crowding continued until Stanner was forced to stop his car, or crash into the braces and cables that flank the bridge. He and Fly, prepared for such an emergency, drew revolvers and got out of the car.

The occupants of the other car numbered six—three in the front, three in the back. The man on the extreme right in the front seat apologized, saying that his car had been crowded and that its driver, in turn, had been forced to crowd Stanner's machine, or be sideswiped itself.

Fly and Stanner, undecided, stood by their machine, guns ready, trying to appraise the occupants of the other car. The traffic on the bridge, meanwhile, jammed, and a bedlam of horns broke loose. Fly and Stanner became bewildered, They wavered, mumbled their apologies, pocketed their guns and started to reenter their sedan.

Immediately their backs were turned, the six in the other car drew automatics and blazed away. Fly and Stanner, dead as they stood, fell in their own blood.

The six then leaped from the limousine. One of them tore open a rear door of Stanner's car, reached in and seized several sacks. Another reached in and gathered up the remainder of these sacks, $20,000 in currency, the payroll of the Fly-Stanner Manufacturing Company, which was to have been used the next day. The other four covered the cars on the bridge.

With a bedlam of screeching horns, shouting men and screaming women around them, the six plunged through the braces and cables to the pedestrian's path along the side of the bridge and ran to the west end of the structure, where a car awaited them. They made their getaway west on Detroit Avenue. The whole affair did not take two minutes . . .

These things happened on the evening

of Tuesday, the 14th of November. They startled The Town as nothing had startled it for years—set it to talking; and they made the sweetest copy the newspapers had run across in a decade.

Wednesday, a little earlier in the evening than the time these events had occurred the night before, two men engaged in a conversation . . .

"You got the breaks, that's all."

"Yeah, but we had a swell story, too."

"There wasn't anything wrong with ours."

"No, I guess not. What you got for tomorrow?"

"Nothin' much."

They stopped talking and listened while a young man across the room called a string of monotonous numbers over a scarred telephone. The young man was not very enthusiastic about it.

"*Hel*-lo! Coast Guard? . . . *Globe* . . . Anything doin', Cap'n? No? . . . Thanks."

The young man hung up the phone, yawned, and turned to talk to three other young men who sat at the table whereon the telephone rested. The two men resumed their conversation. The one who had answered last asked a question—

"What you got?"

"A swell story."

"Oh, yeh?"

"Sure."

"What about?"

"I guess I can tell ya now, Bob—it's past deadline. Why, about Tony Garotta. It's exclusive, too."

"Like hell! You ain't gettin' exclusive stories that I don't know about."

"No?"

"No. There ain't but one thing you ever did that I couldn't do, Joe Rooker, an' that's swim. An' you ain't swimmin' now."

"I always could swim pretty well, couldn't I, Bob?"

"Yeh, but that's a long time ago, an' *that's* another story."

"This story ain't about a long time ago. It's about last night. I got it last night."

"Why didn't you spring it last night?"

"Then I wouldn't have no story tonight. There was enough story this morning, and this won't do any harm bein' a day old."

"No? Well, what about Tony Garotta?"

"He was on the bridge by Stanner's car when Stanner and Fly got killed. He helped, too."

The four young men at the table looked up. The man addressed as Bob looked blank, then incredulous, then amused. He laughed.

"How the hell do *you* know?" The man addressed as Bob was contemptuous.

"Well, I got a damned good reason."

THE MAN who had a "damned good reason" sat in a rickety chair, the front legs of which were dangerously high above the floor, leaning back against a wall which was decorated with rotogravure pictures of actresses, prizefighters, débutantes, and popular thugs. He was sitting in the reporters' room in Central Police headquarters.

His was not an arresting presence. He might have been a shoe clerk, a bond salesman or a cook. But he was none of these; he was a police reporter for the *Globe*, leading morning daily of The Town.

He was short of stature and broad of girth. His hands were small and pudgy, and his legs and belly, as well as his arms, seemed constantly on the verge of bursting his suit, the coat and pants of which never matched.

His head was small and almost the shape of a fat cantaloup. His nose was large and hooked. His mouth was little and full lipped; a dark patch of whiskers meandered from ear to ear leisurely, and usually were in evidence; his hair was thin and rarely cut, and completely surrounded a barren expanse of pasty skin that overlay his peculiar skull. Most of the time he was unwashed—and chewing a cigar, the greater part of which was hidden. The cops all said that Joe had

had his tonsils out to make more room for the cigar.

His eyes were dull and black—you could make nothing of them.

He lounged now against the picture plastered wall, and eyed the man who demanded to know how he knew that Tony Garotta had been one of those six who had done murder and highway robbery the night before, while ten thousand looked on.

"Yeah, I got a reason."

"Better have a good one," said Bob. His tone was sarcastic. "Tony ain't a gentle guy, ya know. He might object. An' you ain't swimmin' with *him*, now, either."

"He never could swim very well, could he?"

"No, but that's a long time ago too; and you ain't swimmin' to this story."

Joe did not answer.

"Well," said Bob—he was still sarcastic—"what's the reason?"

"That," said Joe, "ain't much o' your business, Bob O'Leary, but I'll tell ya, now that deadline's gone. You can run around to the inspector and verify—"

"Aw—"

"—it, see? You can put it in the *Press* then. But I don't mind doin' you a favor, Bob. I'll tell ya how I know Tony Garotta was one o' them six guys on the High Level last night."

"Well, how do ya know it?"

This was not the voice of Bob O'Leary. It came from the door.

JOE AND Bob and the four young men turned sharply to stare at a tall and brawny man who stood in the doorway looking into the dingy, littered room at the six men who sat in the dim glow of dirt incrusted wall lights. Five of those men started violently at sight of the newcomer. The sixth dropped his eyes and swallowed a little more cigar.

The newcomer surveyed each man. The four young men he passed up quickly; they were only the usual up and coming cubs. But he came to a brief halt as he looked into the gray eyes of Bob O'Leary. He knew Bob O'Leary. Then he turned his attention to the little man in the rickety chair. Joe appeared to be dozing. The tall and brawny man, whose eyes reminded you of opaque glass, fixed him with a hard look.

There was utter silence in that reporters' room then. It came down like a quick fog. There was a complete absence of motion. The silence maintained as the glassy eyes skewered Joe's slumped figure. A fire bell, a second alarm, rang out a location sharply, but nobody moved. A patrol drove up outside with a creak and clatter, but the tableau was unchanged. The four cubs looked as if they were about to scream.

"Well, how do ya know it?"

There was no answer.

The tall and brawny man took two steps, grabbed Joe by the shoulder and shook him.

"I said, 'How do ya know it?'"

It had been said that Joe Rooker had no scruples, no mercy, no religion. (The last indictment did not belong. He had, or at least he once had had a religion—his uncle had been a rabbi.) But it also had been said, in envy or admiration, that Joe Rooker was "a damned good newspaper man". And that took in a lot.

He looked up now, leisurely. His dull black eyes met the opaque ones. He yawned, erupted a mass of sodden tobacco shreds. One of the cubs squirmed.

"Hello, Tony."

"I said, 'How do ya know it?'"

"Know what?"

"Know I was on the High Level?"

"When?"

Tony Garotta's glassy eyes blazed. The nostrils of his thin nose quivered. His wiry, cruel hands clenched.

"You know when, you lousy Jew!"

"Strong language, Tony."

"I got stronger—" Tony patted a bulge just below his armpit.

"Oh, yeh?"

"Ya damn' right!" Tony grinned maliciously then.

Somebody sighed, a long painful expulsion of breath. It was Bob O'Leary. Tony chuckled. One of the cubs squirmed again and crossed his legs. Joe looked around Tony and smiled at Bob.

"Take it easy, Bob."

"You better take it easier, Joe," said Tony. "How do ya know it?"

"Know wha—what'd you come down here for Tony, anyway?"

"Oh, just wanted to see how you boys was gettin' along. Come on, Sherlock. Give us the lowdown."

"Well, I'll tell ya, Tony, and you too, Bob, and you boys too." Joe included the four gaping cubs, one of whom was acting strangely, with a sweep of his fat hand.

He leaned back in his chair again and folded his hands over his tight vest. There were ashes on the vest. He flicked some of the ashes off with a stubby middle finger.

"It's in type—" Joe flicked another ash.

"What's in type?" demanded Tony.

"The story of how I know you was on the High Level last night."

Tony grinned. Bob O'Leary grinned. The four cubs did not know whether to grin or not. Tony laughed outright. Bob O'Leary laughed outright. Three of the cubs snickered, but thought better of it. The fourth writhed as if in pain.

Joe brushed his vest.

"Yeah, it's in type."

"I s'pose," said Tony, "ya got an inside story o' the Crucifixion, too."

"That's too old," said Joe. "But I would have had—my folks was there. Anyway, the story of how I know you was on the High Level last night's in type. You can read it in a little while."

"Aw come off, Joe—"

Bob O'Leary might have had more to say, had he not caught sight of Tony Garotta's face. Tony was puzzled; and when a killer does not know whether to be furious or fearful, the result is terrible. But he recovered himself.

"I s'pose," he sneered, "the cops know about it too, huh?"

"Yes, they do, Tony. How'd you come down here?"

"Right down Hamilton to East Third. Up East Third to Superior. Over to Stein's on the Square for a beer. Down Champlain to the sta— Say," he snarled, "if ya know so damn' much, tell me how ya know it!"

He stepped back and eyed Joe suspiciously. Bob O'Leary leaned forward. The cubs, their mouths open, leaned forward. One of them was still wiggling peculiarly.

"Them dumbbells," said Joe, looking at the end of a new cigar that was growing shorter. "They would be out lookin' all over— Why, yes, Tony, I'll tell ya.

"Remember when we was kids? Remember when ya broke your leg? Well, Tony, that right leg o' yours never's been the same since. You always leaned on your right heel a lot more'n ya did on your left. You walk on the side of your right foot."

Every man in the room looked at Tony Garotta's right foot.

"Well, Tony, one o' the guys that took that dough out o' Stanner's car walked on the side of his right foot like you do."

The four cubs swallowed hurriedly. Bob O'Leary stared at Joe. Tony Garotta glared down at Joe's fat head, his glassy eyes unwinking.

"Yeah—" Tony Garotta's voice was hoarse—"and how do ya know that?"

"Because," said Joe, "he was standin' in Stanner's own blood. I took a flashlight picture of the print."

THERE was silence again in the room. Silence, save for Tony Garotta's sibilant gasp and the weak sound of Bob O'Leary clearing his throat. Joe looked at the end of his shortening cigar. Three of the cubs still sat, gaping. The fourth, after writhing violently, rose from his chair and started softly for the door.

Tony Garotta suddenly acted. He whirled, pulled an automatic from its shoulder holster and confronted the cub.

"Where ya goin'? What?"

He pushed the cub in the face. "There ain't a man leavin' this room!"

He turned and looked at Joe. Tony's eyes were terrible to see.

"You damn' kike! Jerk that story!"

"Why, Tony? We're runnin' the photograph, too."

Little flecks of saliva appeared on Tony Garotta's lips. He slowly pulled the automatic up and pointed it at Joe. He stepped forward and pressed the muzzle against Joe's temple. The cub who had squirmed looked very scared and very foolish just then. Bob O'Leary stiffened. The other three cubs breathed raspingly.

"That'll make an awful racket, Tony," said Joe.

"Yeah, but you won't hear it."

"No, but the cops will, and then what'll you do?"

"To hell with the cops!"

"And you'll have to stop and pot these five guys, or they'd make swell witnesses."

These five men grew, if possible, paler.

Tony's gun lowered a trifle. Another patrol clattered up outside. He lowered the gun entirely and stood, tense. From the hall came sounds of conversation. Men—and they were bluecoated men—were nearing the reporters' room. Tony darted to the window. He threw a leg over the sill and looked back.

"Damn you!" Tony was talking to Joe. "You won't live till morning!"

He was gone.

Joe brought his chair down with a bang. He heaved a tremendous sigh and threw sweat from his forehead. Bob O'Leary turned and rushed out of the room.

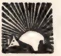
"That's right. Verify it, Bob."

"Aw, go to hell!"

Joe suddenly shot out of his chair and to a telephone.

"City desk! . . . Joe Rooker . . ."

Joe told to a rewrite man the latest episode in the Fly-Stanner murder story.



THE CITY stumbled on along the way to dawn and the presses thundered through midnight. Beneath cold nitrogen lamps the clicking mechanisms of composing rooms made murder more articulate. And then, from beneath great concrete shelters, trucks rumbled forth carrying the story of how Joe Rooker knew that Tony Garotta had been on the High Level when Arnold Fly and Joseph Stanner had fallen in their own blood, while ten thousand looked on and the city roared around them.

And then the city read.

Old men in dented derbies and drooping clothes, sitting in the half light of the Public Square like mooning crows, muttered, sucked their teeth and read their murder. Up in Playhouse Square, young men and women going from theater to night club, paused a moment, scanned the headlines, clucked and chattered, and went on. Over in Newburgh, the steelworkers, eating their lunch, read by the crashing light of the blast furnaces and chewed stolidly. Mysterious, huddled figures, hurrying along the thinning streets, read by the light of furiously winking street signs and went their ways. Down along the lake, in side streets, in deserted outskirts, those who lingered in the greasy holes of all night restaurants and the sour holes of speakeasies, read how Joe Rooker knew that Tony Garotta had been on the High Level the night before. And out somewhere in the residence district, the wives and families of Arnold Fly and Joseph Stanner read and wondered . . .

And all of these Joe Rooker saw. Or, if he did not actually see all of them, he knew. For Joe would have been a splendid artist if he had had less comprehension.

All of those who read saw the street edition of the *Globe*. In the State edition of the *Globe*, the city read of how Tony Garotta had come to Central Police headquarters while the law's forces were combing the city for him, and of his interview with Joe Rooker, and of how he had threatened Joe Rooker, and of his escape through the window of the reporters' room.

The *Press*, because Bob O'Leary had verified Joe's work, went extra, as did the *News;* but the *Globe* had been there first. The *Press* and the *News* challenged the *Globe* as did the other two papers of The Town, and were beaten. Their copies lay in stagnant bales on the newsstands and in the hands of the newsboys. For the *Globe* was serving its own field; the others were invaders. During the night, in fact, from seven o'clock on, the *Globe* was supreme. Seven o'clock was its first deadline; five o'clock in the morning was its final deadline. After that final deadline its vigilance relaxed. Occasionally, if the story warranted it, the plates were made over on the final, but this was seldom. To do this, the story had to be exceptionally big, for the *Press* came on the streets at nine o'clock, and the *Globe* lost its supremacy. It was the morning and night paper; the *Press* was the evening and day paper. Neither could combat the other successfully out of its own chronological precinct. So established were these precincts that an agreement, a journalistic treaty, existed between the two which prevented either, save for the occasional extras, from entering the other's field. The other papers of the town did not matter; the *Press* and the *Globe* led them all. Bob O'Leary was with the *Press*, and Joe Rooker would rather have beaten him in a story than to have sat on the Right Hand.

So the *Press* and *News* and the others who went extra on that rainy November night, failed. Joe Rooker had scooped The Town.

He walked now, across the Public Square, past the old men who muttered over the murder; past the mysterious huddled figures that slunk along the thinning streets in the winking light of electric signs. He walked in plain view and defiantly, in the most public place in The Town, and he walked confidently and safely. Joe Rooker knew a thing or two about men and methods.

But suddenly he started. He hurried into a corner drug store, a marked man and a very successful man in his ill fitting clothes, with his whiskered face and his half swallowed cigar. He changed a dime at the counter and entered a phone booth. He dropped a coin, pushed his hat back on his peculiar head, called his number, sighed, spat on the floor, and waited. The receiver buzzed faintly, and Joe shifted. . . .

"HELLO."

"Hello, honey."

Mrs. Rooker was a tall, magnificently formed and beautiful woman. She loved Joe fiercely. He could imagine her now, her long black hair pouring down her back, her tall figure in pajamas and negligée, at the phone. She would be a bit sleepy, her great black eyes heavy lidded and brilliant in the glow of a sidelight. She would yawn a bit and smile a bit as she heard his voice over the wire, and she would look vacantly at her wrist watch while he talked. Perhaps she would be a little annoyed, or would seem so; but Joe knew she was used to such things. She had married the best newspaper man in The Town.

"Hello, Joe. Where are you?"

"Marshall's on the Square. Been asleep long?"

"Not very. Busy?"

"A little."

"Mrs. Emmer called tonight. She's going to have a baby."

"Is she? Say, honey—"

"Yes—"

"Would you mind doin' somethin' for me?"

"What, Joe?"

"Would you get dressed pretty quick, dress the baby pretty quick, tell the maid to get dressed pretty quick, and leave the house."

"Why, Joe!"

"Please, honey. I just thought of somethin'. I'll have a car waitin' for ya at Detroit and West 85th. You'll do it, won't ya?"

"Why sure, Joe, but—"

"Never mind anything except yourself, the baby, and the maid. You get in the car and come on down to the office. You'll hurry, won't ya?"

"Sure, Joe."

"That's a good girl. I gotta run now. See ya later, honey. G'by."

"Goodby, Joe."

Joe hung up and stared at the phone for a moment. Then he dropped another coin and worked the hook furiously. He called another number. Again he waited. The receiver buzzed dully.

"*Hel*—lo!"

"Hello! . . . Chief?"

"Yeah."

"Joe Rooker. . . . Chief, git a squad out to my house. You know Tony called on me tonight, don't ya?"

"Yeah."

"Well, he put me on a spot, and damn it, I clear forgot he might do somethin' to the wife and kid until just now, Chief. I'll send one o' the *Globe* cars after her, but for the love o' heaven, Chief, git some men out there, will ya? That wop might pull somethin' real fast. Will ya, Chief?"

"Goin' right out, Joe. Right out."

"Thanks a lot, Chief."

Again Joe hung up. He went out of the booth and procured more change. Then he called another number. It was the *Globe*. A squad of police hurried for protection; a long grayhound of an automobile sped for escape.

Joe came out of the drug store and bought a State edition of the *Globe*. He read the story of his talk with Tony Garotta. He looked up at the clock in the terminal tower. Midnight. Five hours until final deadline; five hours, and the biggest story The Town had known in years was breaking fast. Five hours, and Joe Rooker a marked man—and Joe Rooker's wife on the way to escape. Five hours until deadline . . .

AGAIN Joe walked across the Public Square, past the old men with dented derbies—old men sleeping now, with their derbies pulled over their brows and their drooping clothes wrapped close to their withered bodies, their stories of murder cluttered about them like dead leaves.

He walked past the Post Office and up Superior toward the *Globe*. He began to hurry a little. He came to a side street and suddenly stepped back from the path of a speeding car that turned into Superior and headed east.

Joe stood, rooted in his tracks. He had seen, in that speeding car, although the man had hidden his face hurriedly, Bob O'Leary.

Joe ran. That is to say, he hurried. Bob O'Leary in a speeding car meant something. It was three blocks to the *Globe* and Joe made it more rapidly than he ever had made three blocks in his life. He came to the gloomy rear entrance to the *Globe* building. He rang the elevator bell in a frenzy. Slowly the ponderous freight elevator descended, and slowly the old man on it opened the door. Joe bounced in.

"Hello, Dad," said Joe to the old man, who slowly closed the door.

"Hello, Joe." The old man's voice was very feeble.

The ponderous elevator rose to the sixth floor, to the city room, a large, barren expanse of desks and typewriters. Joe bounced in. He hurried to a phone.

"Hel—lo!"

"Chief?"

"Yeah."

"Joe Rooker, Chief. What's happened? Chief, the wife—"

"Take it easy, Joe. Ain't heard nothin' o' that yet, but here's somethin'. They got Tony Garotta cornered out somewhere this side o' Willow Beach. He got turned back by a car comin' east along the lake full o' sheriffs and deputies. The city cops an' them guys are after him now. He's east o' Hunderd an' Fifth and west o' One Sixty-two, an' he's between St. Clair and the lake. They'll probably get him before mornin'."

"Does Bob O'Leary know it?"

"Sure, ya fool. Did ya—"

What else the chief said was cut off. Joe had the reporters' room at Central Police headquarters on the wire.

"What the hell ya doin' down there? That ain't no club. The biggest news o' the night breaks an' you sleep on it.

The *Press* is hot after it. You watch every brick in that police station or I won't only can ya—I'll knock your damn' brains out!"

"Hey!"

The city room jumped. It already was excited. It never had seen Joe Rooker so excited before.

"Get me a car! Benny, go out to the sixteenth precinct and camp. . . . Don, go down and watch that dumbbell at the station. . . . Phil, you stick on the wire to the station an' if they start after Tony's mob, go with 'em. . . . I'll call back from where I am. . . . If they only git him before deadline—that dumb Bob O'Leary. . . . Solo—"

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute! What's this all about?"

Joe looked up. It was the city editor.

"Oh—why they got Tony Garotta cornered this side o' Willow Beach. They got him cut off every way an' are forcin' him to the lake!"

"Why the hell didn't you tell me?"

"Why the hell didn't you find out?"

Joe was gone. He did not wait for the freight elevator this time. He almost slid down the rail of the six flights of stairs, and reached the bottom.

He could see the car through the doorway waiting for him at the curb. But he stopped. He thought of his wife. His fat little body heaved tremendously. He stood for a moment. He wondered whether he should go back and call his wife. But he dismissed that; she probably would be gone. He wondered whether he should go back and call the chief again.

Suddenly he became conscious of the old elevator operator watching him. He passed one of his pudgy hands over his perspiring forehead, squared his shoulders and stepped through the door to the sidewalk.

He started to get into the car. Again he stopped abruptly, his hand on the open door of the car. For across the street he had seen a roadster, its curtains drawn, its engine running. And the door of the roadster suddenly had opened. From it a small, dark man, an automatic in his hand, stepped to its running board. He aimed the automatic at Joe.

"Git goin'!" yelled Joe.

AT THE first shot Joe fell forward into the automobile. The second shot, close after, passed over him as the car started. The car hurtled around the corner, its door flopping, Joe lying half in and half out, his feet resting on the running board, and the driver pale and rigid at the wheel. The roadster, with a parting shot, sped in the opposite direction.

And just after the second shot and just before either car moved, the old elevator operator clutched his throat frantically, strove to cry out, could not, as his blood strangled him, and he fell back into his car among littered stories of murder.

They had cornered Tony Garotta, but they had not cornered his men. And Tony had put Joe "on the spot". But they were gaining on Tony Garotta and his men, for the assassin's car did not go far. A policeman, standing down the street in the shadow of a building, watched as Joe fell and as the two cars started. He waited calmly. He wasted no words calling to the roadster to halt. Just before it came abreast of him he shot. The roadster swerved, its driver slumped over the wheel. The car crashed into a steel lamp post. The gunman's head smashed through the windshield, and the doctor did not arrive in time to save him for trial.

But Tony had other men.

The city stumbled into dawn and the *Globe's* presses crashed through deadline. The old men in dented derbies and drooping clothes awoke and stretched and bought a final *Globe*. They read more about murder, but they did not read of the capture of Tony Garotta. They read something else, though.

But the old men in derbies, the men and women over their breakfasts, the steelworkers on their way from nightshift to dayshift, the drowsy proprietors of early restaurants, the charwomen who read as they scrubbed, the porters who read as they loafed, the motormen and conductors as they came on and off at the car barns, and the hundreds of thousands riding, walking, to daily toil, who read of murder in the final *Globe*—they did not know the half of it. They could not know; they never would know . . .

It began thirty years before when The Town was not one half its present size. It was then that there came to The Town three families: one from Latvia, one from Ireland, and one from Italy.

The Latvian went into the junk business; the Irishman went into the saloon business; the Italian went into the fruit business. The three businesses were next door to one another, and their owners lived upstairs; the three families became friends. Then one August during the nineties, the Latvian's wife gave birth to a son. In September the Irishman's wife presented him with a boy, and in October the Italian rushed out of his fruit store and sputtered excitedly to the sidewalk that he had produced a man-child.

Later when those three boys went to school, the Latvian boy liked it pretty well, the Irish boy liked it better, but the Italian boy liked it not at all. They went to school together for a while and then enmity grew among them. The Italian boy, developing rapidly, bullied his erstwhile playmates and they came to hate him—the Irish boy openly, the Latvian boy with shrewd and terrible, but prudent, passion. Between the Latvian boy and the Irish boy there came to be a rivalry in many things. In athletics the Irish boy always won, except at swimming—the Irish boy could not swim at all. In matters of cleverness, the Latvian boy usually came off first. The Italian boy bested them both in athletics, except swimming—he could swim very little—but they were able to outwit him.

They left school early and sold newspapers.

And so they grew up, two of them hating the third, the third hating and contemptuous of the other two, and two of them friendly enemies. Until well into their twenties all three lived with their families. The Latvian boy grew fat and all out of shape, the Irish boy grew long and gaunt, and the Italian boy grew tall and broad and powerful. The Latvian boy and the Irish boy stayed in the newspaper business and became good newspaper men; the Italian boy followed many pursuits, and became the leader of a powerful gang. He ran rum across the lake from Canada, and he specialized in payrolls.

The name of the Latvian boy was Joseph Rooker; the name of the Irish boy was Robert O'Leary; the name of the Italian boy was Anthony Garotta.

Therefore, the old men with dented derbies and drooping clothes, and all the others of the host who dwelt in The Town and read of murder that rainy November morning, could not know the half of it.

THE THREE of them, Joe Rooker, Bob O'Leary and Tony Garotta, were now engaged in the absorbing game of fighting one another, as they always had done—Joe and Bob friendly enemies, and Tony Garotta the deadly enemy.

For Joe had not been hit by that first shot.

When the car, its door flopping against his back, had lurched around the corner, its driver pale and rigid at the wheel, Joe pulled himself into the tonneau, closed the door and rolled over the back of the front seat to sit down beside the dazed driver. The driver turned his head slowly and jerked the wheel violently.

"Stop a minute," said Joe.

The driver pulled up at the curb and stared at Joe. He wiped his brow.

"Yeah," said Joe, "that's right."

"Ain't you hit?"

"Hell, no."

"But you keeled."

"Sure, before he shot."

"Oh."

"Feel like you can go now?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Then get to the 16th Precinct station."

The gears ground and the car leaped forward. The driver appeared to be exhilarated by Joe's miraculous escape. He sped through the deserted city morning and Joe looked at his watch. It was two hours and a half now until deadline. Two hours and a half until the *Globe* began to yield to the *Press*. Joe had little interest in the other papers. His eye traveled around the little dial of his watch to deadline time. He mused, as the automobile, like a furtive creature of a forest night, hurtled through the streets. For him there were several deadlines.

"Hey!"

Joe's revery vanished and the driver applied the brakes. From either side of the street appeared men, guns drawn. They were bluecoated men.

"Who—oh, hello, Joe," said one of the bluecoated men. "Thought it was somebody."

Joe spoke and the car started again. A few minutes later it rolled up in front of the 16th Precinct station. Joe shot out of the front seat and hurried up the walk to the steps. He took these, with rank disregard for his tight, shiny pants, two at a time. He popped into the room where a sergeant sat behind a desk and several men lounged about in chairs. These were the members of the press.

Joe noticed them all, but he saw only two. One of these was Bob O'Leary. The other was the man Joe had sent from the *Globe*.

"Hello, Joe," said the sergeant.

"Hello. . . . Hello, Bob."

"Hi."

"Joe, there's hell to pay." That was Benny, the man Joe had sent to cover the 16th.

"There sure is," said the sergeant.

Bob O'Leary grinned maliciously. The others grunted and shifted in their chairs.

"What—" began Joe.

"He got away," said Benny.

Joe looked at Bob O'Leary. The grin on Bob's face was growing wider.

"Your deadline—" said Bob, and quit. That was enough.

JOE LOOKED at the sergeant. The sergeant nodded, as if he were delivering an opinion, and wrote something on his report. Joe wondered, idly, whether he were entering the fact that Tony Garotta had baffled the police.

"Yeah," said Benny, "he slipped through. They got the gang with him, the five guys mixed up in the murder. And they got *him* cornered again. He's somewhere between Hundred-and-Thirtieth, One Sixty-second, St. Clair, and the lake. They're stopping all cars—weren't you stopped?"

"Yeh," said Joe, and leaned against the desk. He stuck a cigar in his mouth.

"He's hidden somewhere around here. The only way he can lam is to get to the lake and swim."

"He can't swim much," said Joe absently, and looked at Bob.

"How do you know?" said the sergeant.

Joe looked up.

"His mother told me."

The sergeant looked puzzled, thought it was a wisecrack, and went on writing. Joe walked to a pay phone and called the office.

"City desk!"

"Joe Rooker. I'm at the 16th. Tony got away. He's hid out here somewhere. They're combin' the place. I'll stick around."

"All right, Joe. Benny called before."

"And say . . ." Joe told the story of his escape. The members of the press and the sergeant listened intently.

"Yeah, we got most of it from the cop on the corner, Joe. They got old Dad with that second shot, though. . . ."

"Old Dad! . . . Yeah, I'll stick around for a while and see what breaks. They might git him in time for makeover, anyway. Say—" Joe's fat body shivered —"heard from that car yet?"

"What car, Joe?"

"The car you sent out to my house."

"N-no, not yet, Joe. You live pretty far out, you know."

"You—you ain't heard anything else?"

"No."

"All right. Lemme know, will ya?"

Joe hung up. He turned to the sergeant and tried to be casual.

"You ain't heard anything about my house, have you, Sarge?"

The sergeant looked up sharply. He had caught something in Joe's tone.

"No, Joe, why?"

"Oh, nothin', I guess."

Joe called his house.

"No answer," said the operator.

Joe looked at Bob O'Leary. Bob dropped his eyes.

The members of the press at the 16th Precinct, waiting for the capture of a murderer, or something pertaining thereto, settled themselves again. It was a long vigil, but a familiar one. They had been on others. They dozed fitfully as the night waned and the Western Union clock clicked stealthily.

About them The Town moaned and slept.

Joe Rooker slid down to the floor, leaned against the sergeant's desk and pulled his hat over his eyes. He did not doze immediately. He thought of a number of things, the least of which was not his own safety, but the greatest of which was the safety of his wife and baby. And he thought of old Dad. Then he, too, dozed. He had not been to bed for forty-eight hours.

THE SERGEANT nodded and also dozed in the silence of the murky room there in the headquarters of the 16th. He was roused, now and then, by the phone, but the members of the press, after the first call or two, paid no attention. He answered the phone once more.

"What!" The sergeant's voice was a hoarse whisper. "When? . . . God!"

He hung up the receiver, his eyes staring. Slowly he forced them to look at Joe. He gazed at the fat ball of a man sleeping there beside his desk, and put out his hand. Then he drew back, trembling. Twice he did that, but each time, as he almost made contact, he shivered. Once he started to speak. But he neither touched Joe nor spoke to him. Finally the sergeant, his face drawn and pale, sat immobile, staring at the opposite wall.

The city stumbled into dawn. It was a dawn, ashen and cold; a November dawn, with a fine rain falling.

The *Globe's* presses thundered through deadline. And still there was no capture of Tony Garotta. And still the members of the press dozed there in the murky room of the 16th. And the sergeant still stared at the opposite wall.

Then, from beneath great concrete shelters trucks rumbled forth carrying new stories of murder, of how Joe Rooker knew that Tony Garotta had been on the High Level when Arnold Fly and Joseph Stanner had fallen in their own blood, and of how Tony Garotta had threatened Joe Rooker and had sent one of his men to kill Joe Rooker, of the failure of that attempt, and the success of Tony in escaping the police net. Also, there was another story . . .

A truck rumbled up before the headquarters of the 16th and a bundle of *Globes* thudded dully on the wet sidewalk. Inside, the members of the press—including Joe Rooker—with that uneasiness that comes to the fitful sleeper as dawn approaches, awoke, stretched and rose, to move cramped muscles. The sergeant still stared at the opposite wall.

Joe Rooker laboriously got off the floor, wheezed mightily and swore as he looked at the clock, because deadline was gone, and only by a long chance would he be able to make a makeover. After that there was no long chance. The *Press* held the field.

Joe heard the thudding bundle and started to the door. He stopped a moment and looked at the telephone, half turned to go to it, and then went outside. There lay the compact pile of *Globes*. The carrier would be by in a little while. Joe walked to the sidewalk, took out his pocketknife and cut the string that bound the bundle. He procured several papers and went back into the station. He handed one to the sergeant, who took it, looking at Joe with an expression of pain and fear in his eyes. Joe stared curiously at the officer and then threw all but one paper in the direction of the members of the press, all of whom had sat down again. Bob O'Leary caught one.

Joe looked at the *Globe* to read the story he had made.

The banner was good. The headlines were good. He noted that the makeup was striking without being too sensational. The *Globe* did not print diagrams with large white X's tooled in the plates, the captions declaring the exact spot of dead bodies. He noted that the leads were vivid and clear. He noted all this at first, without actually reading the contents. And then, because he was the best newspaper man in town, he noted everything.

He started. He staggered as if he had been struck in the face. His fat body swayed like a toy balloon in the wind. His pudgy hands crumpled the paper where he gripped it and tore it slowly. Something like a gurgle, a sob of his soul's agony, escaped him.

He wheeled suddenly. His dull eyes were dead no longer. They were like brilliant black onyx. He drilled the sergeant with them and the sergeant looked away.

"You *knew!*"

The sergeant nodded, slowly, with his drawn face still averted.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I couldn't, Joe. I just couldn't."

Joe turned to Bob O'Leary. Bob's eyes looked out the door into the ashen, chilly dawn.

"Did *you* know?"

Bob O'Leary shook his head.

Joe stood then, rocking on his heels, staring at the front page of the *Globe*. Suddenly he crumpled it, thrust it into his coat pocket and rushed to the phone.

"City desk!"

"You knew! You knew!"

Silence.

"You *knew*, damn you!" screamed Joe. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I couldn't, Joe. I couldn't."

"Yeah—I know."

"We're not sure, Joe—"

But Joe had hung up. His eyes were like black onyx no longer. He gazed dully at the floor. Slowly, like a bewildered duck, he waddled toward the door, pulling the crumpled *Globe* from his pocket. By the murky light in the headquarters of the 16th he read once more.

AND THE old men with dented derbies and drooping clothes would read too, and suck their teeth. The people over their breakfasts would read too, and cluck. The whole city would read and mutter.

The deadline was past, and there was now no makeover.

For Joe read, as the people would read, of how his home was bombed and burned, and of how there was no trace to be found of his wife and child and the maid. No trace, perhaps, except some charred things . . .

Joe wandered out into the ashen, chilly dawn to the sidewalk. The rain soaked his hat and ran down his face where tears could not run and wet his lips. The cold wind from the lake fluttered little wisps of his sparse hair that protruded from beneath his hat. And again there came from his small mouth that inarticulate sob that was like a gurgle.

He walked a few paces and became aware of the *Globe* car standing at the curb. The driver had, earlier, gone out of the station to look at something. He had not returned. He sat, now, behind the wheel, staring straight ahead of him. Joe approached mechanically, opened the door and got in beside the driver. He had sat there only a moment when something pressed the back of his head and he heard a voice. It was a familiar voice—

"I been waitin' for you to do that, you dirty kike."

The voice was low and throaty. Joe did not turn. He did not even start. It did not matter much now if Tony Garotta crouched in the back seat of the *Globe's* car and held an automatic at his head. He sat there in the chilly November dawn, staring straight ahead of him. He was conscious that Tony was there, but it left him unperturbed. Where rain had run before, tears now trickled their way down his fat cheeks. But he brushed them away, wearily.

"Have you, Tony?"

"Yeah, for an hour or so."

"How'd you get here, Tony?"

"That don't matter none to you, but I'll tell ya. I gypped that mob o' bulls at One Fifty-third and run between a couple o' houses. Then I beat it over here. They followed the car. The nearer ya come the less they look. So I sneaked back o' the station there. Then I seen your car. When this bozo here —" Tony indicated the driver—"come out, I covered him and got in. That's all. Now you listen—"

"Joe!"

Some one called from the door of the 16th. Both Joe and Tony looked. In the gloom they could not see, but they knew who it was.

"Answer him!"

Tony added pressure on the automatic against Joe's skull.

"Yeah, Bob."

Bob O'Leary descended the steps.

"Let him come over."

Joe said nothing.

"Joe," said Bob as he drew nearer, "I just saw the *Globe*. Joe, there ain't much to say, but—"

"Don't say nothin'!"

That was Tony Garotta. He rose a little in his crouch and waved his gun at Bob. Bob stopped in his tracks a few paces from the machine and stood, his jaw sagging.

"Git in here!"

Bob still stood, staring at the black automatic.

"Tony wants you to get in the car, Bob," said Joe.

"Git in here, damn you—" Tony's voice was a cold whisper—"or I'll blow you in two!"

Bob got into the car.

"Now you," said Tony to Joe, "git in back here with me, too."

Joe got out of the front seat. He opened the rear door and started to get in and, for the first time since the night before in the reporters' room at Central headquarters, he saw Tony Garotta. He paused a moment on the running board and looked at Tony Garotta. And once more his eyes lost their dullness and became as brilliant black onyx. They glowed in the chilly dawn. But Tony did not notice.

"Hurry! We're goin' places. An' I'll sit in the middle."

The self-starter whirred; the engine spat.

"You guys," said Tony, "are drivin' me out o' this mess. I got a launch out near Euclid Beach. I can't get to it alone, but with you two gennelmen, I can make it." The car was moving. "I'll just slide down between an' pull my hat over my eyes. I'm just a drunk gennelman o' the press—see? An' if any bull or any dick stops this wagon, you boys'll tell him just that. If you don't, I'll git arrested, but—" Tony waved the automatic briskly—"you gennelmen won't scoop nobody with the story."

Tony slumped down between Joe and Bob. He pulled his hat low over his eyes. But he could see well enough. And his powerful hands were ready. So was his gun.

He told the driver where to go. The car gathered speed, turned east, and started along the street that lined the lake shore.

THE DAWN was slowly, very slowly, breaking into a sullen morning. Along the street that lined the lake shore the houses stood like silent soldiers in the rainy gloom. And on the porches of these houses were editions of the morning *Globe*. The *Globe's* car rolled smoothly past them on the glistening street. Tony Garotta was taking Joe Rooker and Bob O'Leary for a ride.

"Ya see," said Tony, "they's some rummies due from the other side today. They're my boys. We'll git the launch an' you gennelmen'll be glad to come with me, I know. I'm gonna take ya for a nice long ride."

The car slowed. The spotlights of two motorcycles caught it, held it and two policemen rode up on either side.

"Oh, hello, Joe. Hello, Bob."

"Hello," said Joe and Bob together.

"Since when," said the man at Joe's ride, "did you boys get clubby? Who's that there?"

"He's from the shop," said Bob. "He got drunk."

"They got you guys steppin', ain't they?" said the man at Bob's side. "Where you goin' now?"

"We're runnin' down somethin'."

"Well," laughed the man at Joe's side, "if you run down that tough wop, glom him, will ya?"

They rode on. The *Globe* car rolled on. Bob O'Leary heaved a great sigh. Joe Rooker gazed stolidly at the road ahead. Tony Garotta raised himself and straightened his hat.

"That was nice of you gennelmen," said Tony. "Got a paper?"

Bob produced his.

"Hold it for me," said Tony.

Bob held it as Tony slumped down again. Tony read the front page of the *Globe*.

"Well, well," said Tony. "So they heaved a pineapple in your dump, Joe? An' the wife an' kid was there, Joe? I sent them boys out there, but I hadn't heard. An' now I read it in your paper, Joe. You treat me right, Joe, don't ya? We always been thick though, ain't we? Swell story about how you knew I was on the High Level, Joe—flashlight picture—walk on the right side o' my foot—"

Tony laughed.

Joe turned his head slowly and looked down at Tony Garotta. Tony saw the movement out of the corner of his eye, and chuckled. Joe's eyes were deadly black and they glowed again in the slowly growing morning. Bob O'Leary saw them and started.

"Take it easy, Bob," said Tony. "Don't try nothin'."

He suddenly looked up. They were in the outskirts of The Town now. The houses were few and far back from the street, which had become a road.

"It won't be long now, gennelmen," said Tony. "Turn left next street, driver."

The driver turned left at the next street and drove toward the lake. Tony Garotta raised himself to a full sitting posture and pushed his hat back on his head. He looked at the men on either side of him and laughed. Bob O'Leary looked at him fearfully; Joe stared ahead.

The car entered a stretch of road not far from the lake. On either side the uncut trees of a new subdivision grew profusely.

"About a hundred yards farther, driver," said Tony, "an' then we can git out."

The driver followed directions.

"Right here," said Tony.

The driver stopped.

"Now," said Tony, "you gennelmen can git out. An' you too, driver."

THEY all got out of the car then and stood in the fine rain, waiting. It was full morning now, but gray and gloomy. Tony Garotta looked back in the direction of the main road and then waved them toward the lake. They began to walk, Tony behind, his automatic in his hand, herding them.

Joe waddled along beside the gaunt form of Bob O'Leary, his eyes staring straight before him.

They reached the top of a low rise that declined sharply down to the beach. Fresh water spray from a drumming surf blew over them, borne on the morning wind. Fresh water spray rolled down

Joe Rooker's cheeks and became salty.

"Why, Joe!" said Tony as he came abreast the three. "You got the weeps."

Joe said nothing.

Up the beach a few yards was a shack built out over the water. Tony waved them on. They plodded through the wet gravelly sand, inclining their heads against the wind from the lake. They came to the shack and stopped. Tony reached in his pocket and pulled out a key.

"Here," he said to the driver, "unlock that thing."

The driver went to the door of the shack and unlocked a rusty padlock. He waited.

"Open it up," said Tony.

The driver tugged open the doors. They creaked in the lake wind. Within was a long, sleek speedboat of brown wood, restless on the surging surf that sloshed and slapped around the enclosure.

"Now that," said Tony, "is some scow. And that's what's goin' to take me an' you two gennelmen out to them rummies. And then," Tony continued, borrowing his wit from a comic strip current at the time, "the fun begins."

He waved his automatic at Joe and Bob. Bob watched him, fascinated, but Joe only stared out at the sullen lake which writhed under the ashen sky, wrinkled with the fine rain. The rain came in gusts, according to the wind. All of the men were soaked.

"And you," said Tony, indicating the driver, "I don't know what I'm goin' to do with you. I guess—"

He raised his automatic and pointed it at the man. The driver put up his hands as if to ward off the bullet. He probably meant to scream, but he only moaned and shrank as he backed away.

"I wouldn't do that, Tony," Joe said.

"The hell ya wouldn't!"

Tony snarled and whirled. His movement was threatening, as was his voice, but Joe neither started nor flinched.

"No," said Joe, "I wouldn't."

"And why?" Tony was sarcastic.

"Because he ain't done nothin' to you."

"Oh, yeh? Well, he might do somethin'. I ain't leavin' him here to run an' squeal soon's we put out."

He turned back to the driver. The driver still stood with his hands up. Foolish, puzzled terror twisted his face.

"You might tie him up."

Tony dropped the gun a little.

"You got lots o' murders already, Tony."

Tony wheeled again. He stepped forward and smashed Joe across the mouth with his fist. Joe staggered back. Bob O'Leary trembled. The driver dropped his hand and began to sob. The rain, coming in gusts according to the wind, diluted the blood that oozed from Joe's lips and trickled through the whiskers on his chin.

The blood excited Tony.

"You fat kike! When you get potted you'll bleed like a stuck hog. Shut up!" he screamed at the sobbing driver.

The driver choked on his sobs and coughed. They were all silent for a moment. Joe wiped his mouth with a dirty handkerchief.

"Well, what'd I tie him with?"

"One o' those lines." Joe pointed at the moorings of the boat.

Tony considered.

"Well," he said, finally, "let's git goin'." He waved them into the shack.

"Just to make sure he won't holler," said Tony.

He swung. The driver dropped with a sigh—it might have been of relief—as the barrel of Tony's automatic struck his skull.

"You guys tie him up."

Joe and Bob went to work. Tony watched them suspiciously. When they were finished with the driver, he ordered them to untie the boat. They did. The driver was thrown on the beach within the shack; the other mooring line was dropped into the boat.

"Bob," said Tony, "git up front and I'll sit with you. Joe's gonna drive for his own ride."

THEY all got in. Tony and Bob sat forward, facing Joe. Joe sat behind the wheel. He turned the engine over. It was cold, but he primed it and it spat. Finally it caught and the boat thrashed from side to side in its slot. Then it moved slowly out, gathered speed, and nosed toward Canada.

Out across the sullen, wrinkled lake, under the ashen sky, through the fine, gusty rain, it flew, white wings of spume attending it.

And even now the old men in dented derbies and drooping clothes, the people in their homes and offices, the hundreds of thousands walking the streets of The Town, were reading of how Joe Rooker knew that Tony Garotta had been on the High Level when Arnold Fly and Joseph Stanner had been done to death, and of how Tony Garotta was on the run, and of how a man's home had been snuffed out with a bomb.

"Flashlight picture of my feet, eh, Joe? Hot, ain't it, Bob? The wife, Joe? The kid? Move over, Bob."

But Joe only went about his business of driving the speedboat. Now and then he wiped the oozing blood from his mouth and flung the rain from his eyes. He stared past Tony Garotta at the sullen lake.

"Hold her straight, Joe, until I tell you, an' don't try no tricks—God, it's wet."

Tony pulled a bottle from his hip, drank, and shuddered.

"Have a drink, Joe?" Joe shook his head.

"You, Bob?"

Bob O'Leary turned away.

"Might sting your mug, eh, Joe?"

Tony laughed boisterously.

The boat leaped across the swells of the wrinkled lake like a joyous dolphin. They were pretty far out, now. Away to the left they could see the buildings of The Town, great piles of illumination shining faintly in the gloom. Out ahead of them a freighter plied west, probably on its last trip before winter began to creep down from Superior and strangle shipping.

Tony took another drink. He looked at Joe and then at Bob O'Leary. Bob stared back at the dreary, wooded shore, directly behind them. Tony pushed him in the face.

"Show a little life. You ain't got long. You too, kike." He swung the open bottle at Joe. Drops of its fiery contents hit Joe in the face.

Joe wiped them away. He said nothing. He held the boat straight for Canada. But now and then he turned his eyes on Tony Garotta, and each time they glowed with a black brilliancy. Tony swung his gun idly.

"How far out are they, Tony?" said Joe.

"Not far now, Joe my boy. Not far."

Tony turned his head and looked. Joe watched him.

"Bear a little to the left, Joe."

Joe bore a little to the left. Far out in the wet gloom beyond the freighter he could see a dark smudge on the horizon. He looked at Tony again.

"That it, Tony?"

Tony turned his head and looked at the dark smudge. He tensed a little. He half rose from his seat. The boat was flying at forty miles an hour.

Tony was on his feet now. He rested the barrel of the automatic on the rail and raised his hand to shelter his eyes from the driving rain. He stepped up on the seat. Bob O'Leary happened to look at Joe, and gasped.

JOE, with all the strength of his fat arms, wrenched the wheel sharply to the right, as far around as it would go. A second later his round body bounced out of the seat straight at Tony Garotta.

The boat swerved abruptly, like a frightened dolphin, and dipped sharply to the left as it turned. Tony Garotta waved his arms frantically in an effort to keep his balance, just as Joe's body hit him. He screamed a curse, lost his gun as he threw his arms wildly, and floundered overboard. Joe fell across the gunwale. Bob grabbed him by the coat and pulled him to safety.

"Thanks, Bob."

Joe scurried to the wheel and turned back toward Tony.

Tony paddled feebly in the icy water. The swells lifted him, shook him, and flooded over him. He gasped and coughed. He shuddered as the water's chill bit him. He strangled as a breaker hit him in the face. He thrashed as his clothes grew heavy. He tried to scream, but he only gurgled. His broad face was now a mask of terror.

And around him, like a shark, now, the speedboat moved in a slow circle.

Joe had throttled the motor down. He steered the boat carefully and each circle was smaller than the last. Dispassionately, only with that terrible glow in his eyes, he watched Tony Garotta struggle. And Bob O'Leary, sitting stunned, looked from the floundering figure in the water to the fat figure at the wheel and wondered.

Nearer and nearer came the boat and more frantic grew the struggles of Tony Garotta. His lips were blue and his face livid with fear and exhaustion. His glassy eyes appealed to Joe as the boat came closer. Joe reached in the tool box and brought out a large wrench. He glided up to Tony Garotta. As the boat came by him, Tony threw his hands over the gunwale. But Joe did not stop. He moved on slowly and smiled at Tony's fruitless efforts to climb in.

He left the wheel and kneeled to look down into the face of Tony Garotta. He drew from his pocket the crumpled sodden copy of the *Globe*, smoothed it, and held it before the terror shot eyes beneath him. He pointed to the story that told of how a man's home had been bombed, of how the lives of a man's wife and child had been snuffed out, and of how there were no traces—only charred things.

His battered lips smiled a little. He suddenly wadded the sodden paper into a ball, and with a sobbing curse, flung it into the face beneath him. Then he lifted the wrench and with two terrible blows smashed the fingers that clutched the gunwale.

Tony let loose with a moaning cry, and again he thrashed. And again—although much smaller now—the speedboat circled. But Tony could not last much longer. The efforts of his arms and broken hands began to subside.

Joe brought the boat up again and drew alongside the struggling figure. Tony threw his hands over the gunwale and clung with his palms. And once more Joe left the wheel and knelt above him. For a moment he glared down at the man beneath him.

It had been said that Joe Rooker had no scruples, no mercy, no religion. He had little mercy; but he did have scruples.

He hit Tony Garotta over the head with the wrench and grabbed him by the hair as he started to sink.

"Gimme a lift, Bob."

For the first time since Joe had sent Tony overboard, Bob O'Leary moved. They dragged Tony Garotta aboard his own boat.

"We'll truss him up," said Joe.

* * *

THEY took a line and tied Tony's hands and feet. He lay in the bottom of the boat like a sack. Bob went forward and sat down. Joe went back to the wheel. They both gazed at the man who lay between them. Joe's head drooped a little. He sighed wearily.

The boat rose gently on the cold swells of the wrinkled lake. The motor was dead. Across the leaden reaches came the bray of a freighter, and from away to the left came the faint shriek of whistles, the city's hymn of noon.

Bob O'Leary looked up suddenly. He started and looked at his watch.

"Chees!" said Bob. "What a story. An' it's already noon."

Joe looked up, then. His eyes met those of Bob O'Leary across the inert form of Tony Garotta. He lifted his round shoulders a little and looked at his own watch. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a damp cigar. He bit the end off absently and put the cigar into his mouth. His eyes made little nervous twinkles.

"So it is, Bob."

"Well, start this thing, and let's get back to town."

High noon. No deadlines for Bob O'Leary now, and Tony Garotta captured; captured, moreover, in a manner that would make the most sensational story in America. Seven hours until the first *Globe* deadline and the end of the day for the *Press*. Seven long, beautiful hours.

Joe started the engine. He turned the boat toward town. He did not, however, set as rapid a pace as before. The boat slid along at a fair rate, parallel to the shore, about two miles out. Bob O'Leary lost his lethargy. He beat his fist against his palm. He looked up and grinned.

"This'll make a swell yarn for the final. Just at the rush hour." His grin became gloating. "How about deadline now, Joe?"

"Looks like you got the breaks, Bob," said Joe.

"This'll whip that story of yours that you got last night, won't it, Joe?"

"Guess it will."

They lapsed again into silence. Joe steered on a straight line. They rode for an hour. A fog came down and blanketed the dull lake. It cut off the city. The boat went on blindly. Tony Garotta showed no signs of returning consciousness.

"Better head for the Coast Guard, Joe. I can phone from there."

"Yeah."

Ahead, now, a whistle blared in the mist, and a lean, cloudy stream of light suffused the gloom. That was the Coast Guard lighthouse. Bob O' Leary grew very restless.

ABOUT a quarter of a mile from the lighthouse, a stone tower which reared itself at the end of a long breakwater—The Town's artificial harbor—the engine of the boat suddenly raced, roared violently, then faded out altogether. Bob looked up apprehensively. Joe got up and opened the horizontal doors above the engine. The boat glided to a stop.

"What the hell!" said Bob.

"Don't know. Wait a minute."

Joe began to tinker with the engine.

"I'll have it fixed in a minute, Bob."

Joe had a wrench. He worked with it a few minutes. Then he threw something over the side. There was a tiny splash. Joe threw his wrench into the water and walked to the back of the boat. He took off his overcoat and his jacket and vest.

"What the hell you doin'?" said Bob.

"Gettin' ready."

"For what?"

"To go swimmin'."

Joe lifted the anchor weight and threw it over. Then he took of his shoes.

"Are ya plumb nuts?" said Bob.

"No."

"Then what the hell are ya goin' to do?"

"Swim to the Coast Guard."

"What! Why—what's wrong with this boat?"

"It won't run, Bob. I just opened the distributor and threw the brush into the lake. This is one time when ya swim to a story."

Joe dived. Bob O'Leary's curse was drowned as Joe went under. He came up shivering.

"I'll s-s-s-send s-s-s-somebody for ya around s-s-s-seven o'clock. *That's deadline.*"

Joe made it.

He dragged his fat body up the iron ladder of the Coast Guard's tower and sank, a pudgy, shivering mass on the stone platform. He rested a moment. Then he crawled to leeward and looked out. He could see nothing of the speedboat through the thickening fog.

He got up and wobbled around to the door.

There were five men in the tower. They were playing cards. They resembled wax figures when Joe half fell in the door. He staggered toward a chair and might have collapsed, but they snapped out of it and caught him.

"Almighty! Joe Rooker!"

"Hello, Cap'n," said Joe. "Anything doin'?"

"Joe— Say, Joe, I've got—"

"Gimme a drink first, Cap'n."

They gave him a drink of whisky taken from a Canadian rum runner. Joe took two great gulps. It warmed him. Some one brought him steaming coffee. They tore his dripping clothes from him and wrapped him in blankets. They placed him before an open fireplace and brought a pan of hot water for his feet. And they gave him a cigar.

"Was on this Tony Garotta thing, Cap'n—"

"Joe, I read about your— Say, I've got—"

"An' I had a boat. I thought maybe Tony was tryin' to lam by the lake. The boat went dead. I was wetter'n hell anyway, and I might have been out all night. I can swim, ya know."

"Yeah, I know. Say, Joe, I've got a message for you. The police reporter for the *Globe* told us about it when he was callin' the rounds this mornin'. We wrote it down. They didn't know where you were, when you left the 16th, and they've been phonin' all over hell for ya. They even thought of us."

Joe looked at the captain quizzically and took the message. It was folded once. He opened it and read it. His tired, bewhiskered face quivered as he read, and he turned away. His face relaxed, for the first time since all this business of murder and those who committed it had claimed him. And as his face relaxed, tears, unrestrained, rolled down his fat cheeks. He sobbed silently.

The men of the Coast Guard stood for a moment and said nothing.

"Want to phone, Joe?" asked the captain.

"Not now, thanks," said Joe. "I want to rest. Don't tell any reporter I'm here, will ya?"

They let him rest. He sat by the fire. He might have dozed as the afternoon declined and the gloom outside became thicker and the lean stream of light circled slowly and monotonously above. He *might* have dozed . . . ("Mrs. Emmer called tonight. She's going to have a baby.")

The Coast Guard's whistle moaned in the mist. Other whistles came groaning across the lake. The rain, still fine, and still gusty, beat fitfully against the small panes in the tower. And not far away, blanketed by the fog, Bob O'Leary, under Joe's overcoat, shivered and cursed and waited, while Tony Garotta still lay, inert and unconscious . . .

("You'll do it, won't ya, honey?")

ACROSS the harbor the city groped in the gloom and wondered. The *Press* came out and held the day. The other afternoons, watching it, followed its lead. The cold nitrogen lamps of composing rooms revealed clicking mechanisms setting speculations. And The Town read and muttered in the fine, gusty rain. The day went down and the city stumbled into dusk . . .

They thought Joe dozed. They let him alone as he sat, huddled, through the long afternoon. They let him alone, and perhaps he did doze a little. But most of the time he looked, through nearly closed eyes, at the licking flames of the fire, and thought of many, many deadlines.

"What time is it, Cap'n?"

"Oh, are you awake, Joe? Why, it's 6:30."

Joe got up and waddled in his blankets to the nearest phone.

"City desk!"

"Joe Rooker—"

"Where—"

"Coast Guard lighthouse. Gimme a rewrite. I got the story of Tony Garotta's capture."

"Wha— All right, Joe. . . . Say, Joe, your wife—"

"I've already heard. Gimme the rewrite."

"Alrea— All right, Joe."

Joe told his story. The men of the

Coast Guard sat silent and listened. Joe's story implied that they had a duty to do, but they stayed and listened anyway, and grinned a little. Joe finished and hung up.

"Tony'll sure get a hot seat, Joe. They got his mob too, you know."

"Yeah, I know. I forgot to tell ya when I come in, Cap'n, that Bob O'Leary and Tony Garotta are out there about five hundred yards from here. You'd better go get 'em now. Bob's pretty wet, and I'll bet he's sore as hell—" Joe laughed, and it was a little hysterical. "Can I go to bed?"

"Sure, Joe, there's cots upstairs. We'll give Bob one, too."

"An' you'd better let the cops know about Tony, now," said Joe.

He smiled, as he waddled off in his blankets, up the circular stairway of the tower.

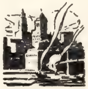
The *Globe* passed its deadline.

Under the cold nitrogen lamps the machines set, not speculations, but an amazing train of facts, and the *Globe's* presses thundered triumphantly. And then, from beneath great concrete shelters trucks rumbled forth carrying the story of Tony Garotta's capture; carrying also the preceding events, including the account of how a man's home had been bombed and burned.

But also the *Globe* carried the story of how Joe Rooker's wife and baby and maid had left the house before it had been bombed and burned, and of how the driver of the *Globe's* car, wise in the ways of men and methods, had taken them out of The Town, to the little city of Elyria, some miles distant, and had told no one of where he had taken them, fearing to do so, because Tony's mob had been at large. But after the capture of Tony's mob, and the flight of its leader, according to the *Globe*, this canny driver had informed the world. And the whole of the interested world had known—all except Joe and his two companions in the speedboat, and the two companions in the speedboat did not matter much in this. But Joe had read all that in the newspaper code message handed to him by the Coast Guard. His family was now on its way, safe, from Elyria. Joe could afford to waddle off up the steps and to bed.

And the city read, after its tedious and gloomy day, and marveled—and slept.

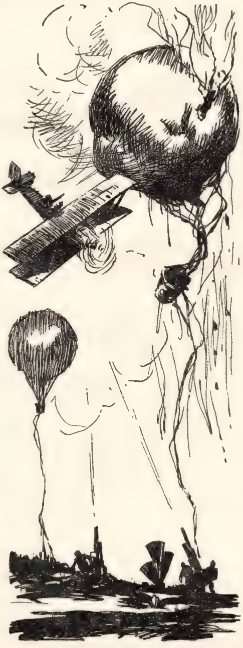
Joe Rooker once more had scooped The Town.



PURSUIT

by ANDREW A. CAFFREY

A tale of the American "Balloon Strafers"



WHEN headquarters separated Jack Langdon from his pursuit group and sent him to fly two-seaters, headquarters came very close to breaking a stout flying heart. For Langdon, there was nothing to do but pack and go; anything in the way of protest would have netted him nothing, besides being very bad taste. Nevertheless, between high dudgeon and low spirits, the boy hovered and suffered for days.

Flying *chasse*—pursuit—was the holding of all that war could give. But piloting a two-seater—any two-seater was just plain hell. You would not ask an Oldfield or a De Palma to drive a ten ton truck, and expect him to like it, would you? Nor would you detail Sande to ride a mechanical nag. Well, Langdon was to air what these others are, or were, to track and turf; and that, thoughtless headquarters should have known. But this same headquarters—Air Service, S.O.S. Tours—was no respecter of individuals. If the observation outfits were short of men, there was only one place to get them—from pursuit.

Langdon, when the ax fell, was at Issoudun's last instruction field—the combat school—Field No. 8. Another day or two and he would have been safe.

"Now, look here, Langdon," the officer in charge of flying at No. 8 had said, when the boy was called upon the carpet and assigned to report at Romorantin for De Haviland training. "We don't want you to go out of this field tonight feeling rocky against us. We're not discriminating. Tours called for five. There were only five of you ready to shove off. It's tough; it's rough; it's rotten. You've put everything on the ball. You're an A-1 *chasse* flyer, and the best hand with a machine gun we've ever turned out. The game was made for you, and nobody hates worse than we do to see you leaving pursuit."

"That's all right, Captain," Langdon had said. "You've been white to me here at No. 8; she's a *bon* school. But—and pin this in your hat—I'm not quitting pursuit. They can send me to the two-place hacks, but they can't make me do two-place missions.

"I'm a pursuit man, and no matter where they sink me, I'll still be a pursuit flyer. They can anchor me to an observation balloon's cable, or put me on the business end of a shovel, but as long as I have life in me, I'll fight this war *à la chasse*—right on the other guy's tail."

Late that night Langdon and his four fellow travelers detrained at Romorantin. Romo', along with its many other things of air, was the first European home of the American made De Haviland plane. Langdon had only seen one of these big ships before—big to scout flyers. That was when Lieutenant Rube Williamson had flown the first DH from Romo' to Field 8.

"Oh, these big crates are all right, I guess," Rube had told the gang. "But a DH is a DH, and can never be a *chasse* machine, you know. No matter how you figure, bunch, a ten ton truck is a ten ton truck and, if the truth must be known, that's how these DH babies handle—like heavy duty trucks on old rubber. They've got lotsa power, but little pep; and less of that old maneuverability stuff than an Otis elevator. But let me tell you, cadets, when the nose of this hack gets away from you, it'd shame an elevator with the cables cut. Whew! They're planting them every day at Romo'."

AT ROMO' Langdon and his mates reported for DH instruction.

"Are these DH's bad?"

The instructor was fast on retort.

"Boy, I'll say they're bad! These here culls just ain't got no conscience a-tall, nohow. For my own part, I'm going to quit air for the Tank Corps. As a rule, when these crocks hit the sod, nothing's above ground but the rudder, waving like a flag over a hole in the ice. I came here with ten friends. Four of them are up there on the hill—boxed."

"Ten friends?" Langdon mused, as though this had something to do with the business at hand. "Nobody in the world has ten friends."

"That's how it looks to you," the instructor answered. "Any guys that are sent up here to fly DH's sure have no friends! And that's why you won't mind being bumped off . . . Anyway, let's see what you boys can do with these arks. Who's who here? Let's get a look at your monickers. When I call your name, step stiffly to the front, stand at rigid attention and answer—'Here, kind sir.' Lieutenant John J. Langdon!"

"On the job, kind sir," the new arrival answered. "And I'm a guy as ain't got no friends."

"Langdon?" the instructor repeated. "I've heard of you, Lieutenant—never mind the salute. Weren't you the bird who flew Major Greene from Mitchel Field clean to Hazelhurst, upside down, and told him that you were trying to get a look at your landing gear—that you thought you had blown a tire on the take-off?"

"The same dizzy guy," Langdon said. "And wasn't it strange? I couldn't get a look at those wheels; and that was why I flew the major all the way back to Mitchel in the same way, upside down. Till I'd tried it, you couldn't tell me that a pilot wouldn't see the bottom of his plane by turning the bottom up. Is it not all strange, kind sir?"

"It sure is," the instructor agreed. "But lend an ear, Lieutenant. We have a commanding officer here who likes to ride in DH's. One of these days I'll manage to get you and him in the air in the same ship. Do you begin to see light?"

"That's one of my worst troubles, kind.

sir. My eyes take in too much light. The docs have a fancy name for it. But, anyway, it causes me to see—or think I see—fun in things that strike others as being drab. For instance, after that flight at Mitchel, Major Greene said that it was his first trip in the air."

"And the records," the instructor smiled, "prove that it was his last. Now, ten years later, the record still stands."

After one turn of the field with Langdon on the controls, the instructor gave him an O.K. He simply said, as he stepped from the plane:

"You're jake, Lieutenant, but if I were you, I wouldn't land these DH's out of a loop like that. Hell, Langdon, life's sweet, even at an observation school. Come on now, go on living. Maybe you'll get a shipment back to *chasse*. Others have done it, and the war is young. You know your air, and that's no small item. But the good ones, Langdon, are the ones we pack in large boxes. And the other kind, damn 'em, we can't get rid of. You know, there are observers here, Langdon, who just won't qualify. They're afraid of the Front and won't leave Romo'. And just so long as their observation work is below grade, we can't ship them out. What's the use? They wouldn't be worth a damn to any squadron . . .

"Now, just a minute. A mighty thought strikes me. Langdon, I'm going to put some of these dumb johns behind you. Maybe you can show them their objective. If you'll fly 'em the way you just flew me, the Front will look like an old ladies' home to the most timid of these goldbricks. Oh, just one more word before you take off. Don't fly as close to other planes as you flew to that one a little while ago. That was Colonel Kingsley. He's from Tours. Man, you were too near."

"That was all right," Langdon assured the instructor. "I wasn't trying to pull anything fast. I just wanted to learn something. You see, I'm accustomed to flying rotary motors with propellers turning at about 1400 revs. Well, this Liberty was doing about 1700 revs per minute and I just wanted to get a peek at that other bird's instrument board. It was all right; his was turning the same. But 1700 R.P.M. seemed mighty fast."

"Hell!" the instructor said. "I hope your clock never stops, or you might try to get a peek at some other pilot's wrist watch. But go ahead, take off. See you later . . .We're going to like each other, Langdon."

WITH a full tank, good for four hours' flight, the new DH pilot went back into the sky. Off toward Vierzon, at sunset, he spotted something that made his heart glad. There, with about twenty thousand feet under them, was a Nieuport "27" patrol, from Field 8. He knew that they were from No. 8 because, coming in close, all five Nieuports revealed ship numbers with which he was familiar. All of them were students; not an instructor's ship was among the lot.

Langdon felt fine. He climbed on the front man's tail, broke the formation and tried to induce the bird to go "round and round". The lead man was not looking for combat with a DH. He went into a dive and waved Langdon away. But the merry one followed. Then, with his power running wild, the retreating Nieuport flyer burned out his rotary engine. Langdon saw the propeller stop. Then he leveled off and started to climb back to the rest of the flight. A man with a dead engine is no man at all.

One of the remaining four, when Langdon closed down on their rear again, deliberately killed his motor and went into a spin. The other three, somewhat bewildered, remained to mill a bit. But when Langdon's propeller came near to biting chips out of one of their rudders, that Nieuport also called it a day. Enough is enough. Langdon saw the machine start down for a landing.

Jack Langdon had discovered something. What had started as fun, took on the magnitude of worthwhile research.

He had learned that a DH, rightly flown, could combat—could go round and round—with a *chasse* plane.

The remaining two Field No. 8 ships had followed their disabled mates to earth. Jack Langdon hung around to make sure that five safe landings had been made; then he laughed, sang a bit and looked about for new worlds to conquer.

West of Bourges, he found a Farman "pusher" from the French school at Châteauroux. It was drifting along at eight thousand feet. Langdon came up from the rear and had his left wingtip nestled in close to the Frenchman's outriggers, before the Châteauroux flyer noticed that he was not alone. Then a badly frightened face under a large crash helmet stared, wild eyed, across that short space. Langdon's heart skipped a beat with the shock. The face under the helmet was a boy's.

"You damn' bully," Jack Langdon said to himself. "Get t'hell gone from here before you scare this game little frog to death."

He throttled his power, dropped his right wing and slipped away from the Farman. Then he turned back, headed into the last rays of the sun and cut for Romo'. There was joy in his heart, and he was making himself all kinds of fine promises.

These DH's, he decided, were not the poorest things in the air, and if a young fellow were to apply his best talents—Well, chances were, he could manage to make himself felt.

"Yes, sir," he said, talking aloud. "I'll talk with the riggers. See what they think about washing some of the incidence out of these wings. Bet with the outer wing bays washed flat, there'd be no drag and the old crate would swing around on a dollar. And that will speed her up a lot, too. No question at all. If we flatten these surfaces out, we'll add eight to ten miles per hour. What *can* be done, is *going* to be done, or I'm a wet bird. In the meantime, unless they put the screws on me, I'll combat everything that flies in this neck of the tall timber."

Early the next day, though, they did climb Langdon's frame. They climbed him twice. Once on account of the complaint that Field No. 8 sent through from Issoudun; again because of a wail that came up from Châteauroux.

"I don't blame the French kid in the hayrack Farman," Langdon told the officer in charge of flying, upon whose carpet he was arraigned. "But those dudes from No. 8 should hang their heads in shame. The idea of refusing combat with a DH! Those five birds should be forced to stand a court-martial, sir. Why not make this an issue, sir?"

"By hell, Lieutenant, there's food for thought there! But look here, Langdon—be careful not to climb any of these two-place Sopwiths that you see fluttering around here; any Sops, Avros or Caudrons. They're always full of fat majors and lean colonels, to say nothing of a few supernumerary generals of sundry ranks. And if you ride any of them, the war ends for you. We have one cadet in the guard house now. He dared to come in with a dead stick when a major was trying to take off."

"Well, what the hell should he have done?" Langdon asked. "Stay up there with a dead motor till the major decided to take off?"

"That was the cadet's problem," the officer in charge of flying stated. "And he didn't get the right answer. The major gave his own ship the gun and crashed into the cadet's plane. Don't you work up any problems here, Langdon, unless you can see the solution beforehand. A pilot in the guardhouse is no flyer at all."

"I'm immune, sir. You know how blacksmiths and guardhouse keepers laugh at love, or something like that? Well, I've fallen in love with DH's. That's strange, I know; but it's a fact. Me and the DH's are getting together, and we're going some place."

"I'll give you a push toward the Front, Langdon, as soon as I see a chance. Now get into the air and pile up as many hours as you can. That's what counts.

These forty and fifty hour pilots are not lasting long on the Front."

"I've had two hundred hours, sir, and I'm ripe for the bow. All my old bunch are fighting the Battle of Paris right now, and here am I poling DH's for the everlasting glory of the S.O.S. The thing ain't right, sir, no matter how you figure."

DURING the day he flew different missions with two of the instructor's worst goldbricking observers. Each time Langdon arrived over the practise objective—Neung, Orleans, Chinon, Blois—he would yell back—

"Do you get it?"

"Too high," the student observer would invariably sing out. And, as a rule, the approach altitude would be above fifteen thousand feet. "Too high, Lieutenant."

"Hold everything! We'll fix that all right," Langdon would assure the victim. Then he would put the rambling DH into a tight power spin and cut down the altitude so fast that no rear seat observer would care to be present a second time. Or, if he did not spin, he would execute a vertical sideslip that, by rights, belonged to much smaller and trimmer craft. At any rate, each man he took up finished his observation class in one quick lesson. The unfortunate goldbrick would come back to Romo', pea green and dead eyed.

"Can he fly?" these boys who had liked Romo' so well would say. "Can he! Oh, hell, give me air."

But no more air with Langdon. Within the week, he had every goldbrick off the instructor's hands.

"But I don't want you to get too good, Langdon," the instructor would warn. "They'll keep you right here for duration if you do. Then you'll have to pull something raw to get moved. For instance, stop rolling your wheels across the shop roofs. You think they don't see it, but the headquarters gang have been watching you. You know how they like to be entertained. Don't show 'em anything. But here's good news:

"I've got you lined up for a mission to Paris. You're going to lead a ferrying group close to the big town and deliver ten DH's for Front line squadrons. No, you don't get a smell of the Front. Your mission ends when you deliver the ferry at Orly. But you're going to get a chance to *oo-la-la*, kid."

"Strange, but that leaves me cold," Langdon replied. "I don't want to fight that Guerre de Paree till after I've won the right to spread my line on the boulevards. Then I'll strut. And don't think that I don't want to. Boy, I'm saving up for the biggest pair of chest wings that's ever been worn on a Yank blouse. And that's some big. And I've got me a swagger stick, too. It has a spark plug in the end of it, and a machine gun cartridge on the tip. You see, I'm a regulation Yank. All set and a-rarin' to go—when the right time comes. Yes, sir, Paris is going to sit up and rub a pair of bleary eyes. Yankee Doodle's going to ride right into town and on the make, too.

"But how about giving me a final *lâche* and kicking one *bon pilote* toward the Promised Land?"

"No can do right now, Langdon. But I'll tell you what might be done. If a call for DH men comes down the line while you're up Orly way, I'll get a wire to you there and have your orders sent along. If you're traveling light, take your personal junk by air on the ferry trip."

"I'll do that," Langdon said. "The other pair of socks won't be any kind of a load for a DH's observation pit. When do I head this ferry?"

"Tomorrow. That is, if the new planes are all assembled by that time. They're all on the floor in final assembly now. In the meantime, be a good guy, Langdon. Watch your step. And if you run across any Issoudun Nieuports, Spads or Morane Saulniers—well, snub the whole gang. What's a bunch of *chasse* pilots to a guy who can do his *chasse* in a DH? Stick to your class, kid."

"Damn' tootin'!" Langdon said, and went out to fly—and snub everything on wings.

At 2 P.M, the next day, Langdon stood in the cockpit of the point DH of a grounded V of ten such planes. The nine who were to follow him were, to a man, of Langdon's type, eager for anything, and anxious to get under way on this cross country hop. Cross country flying, at that time, rated high among the glories that went to make the romance of air. It was all adventure. Impatiently, the waiting nine goosed their motors and watched for the second when Langdon's hand should fall. At 2:05, the leader slid into his seat, cracked his throttle, lifted his tail and took off. Two by two, in an ever mounting cloud of dust, the others took up the slack, filled in on Langdon's rear and roared into flight. A turn of the field, and the shabby V formation went into the north. All ten did not get to Orly that day. Langdon watched three of the boys make safe landings with dead, or dying, motors, at Neuville, Etampes and Juvisy.

"Guess that's all right by me," he mused, after he and the others had circled about the unfortunate each time. "Those boys either had motor trouble or they know chickens in these towns. If it's motor trouble, it's common and unavoidable; and if it's chicken, it's class and *pour d'honneur d'Air Service d'Amerique*. And either way, or both, I'm for 'em. Just three little jobs for Field Service; and Field Service must have something to do."

Through benefit of Field Service they were all at Orly next noon.

"I'm going to hold you boys here for a few days," the commanding officer said when they reported for return railroad transportation. "We expect to have a flock of ships going back to Romo' for repair. And you're the men to ferry them. Enjoy yourselves.

"How're you boys fixed for francs?" And the commanding officer, who was young himself once, smiled.

ON THE second day of their lay-over, orders for the Front came through for Langdon and two of his ferry mates. A Roman holiday was held, and the three borrowed scout planes to celebrate. Langdon flew his through the *Arche de Triomphe* at high noon, wearing a high hat. He got away with it, and nothing much was said.

"But," the Orly flying officer reminded him, "you'd have rotted in Prison Camp No. 2 had things been messed up in the *Place de l'Arche de Triomphe*."

"Ain't it the truth, sir?" Langdon had agreed. "Nowadays failure doesn't pay. Yes, sir, a guy's crazy to slip up."

"Tomorrow, Lieutenant Langdon, "the Orly official went on, "you three transfers, with you in charge, will ferry three of these new DH's up to the Trente-Neuf squadron's 'drome. You'll get their location last thing before taking off. It's an American group in an American sector—a sector all bought and paid for. Major John Mack's in charge up there. Boy, you're in luck—drawing a C.O. like Mack. He's one of the gang and actually flies. Pilots from the front seat too, and without a second lieutenant hidden away on the rear controls. Give the major a hello for me, Lieutenant. Get the numbers on those three ships and look 'em over. If you want anything around here, ask for it—and see if you get it! Or if you want anything, take it—and see if we care!"

The next day was fine. It was life's rosiest for three willing Yanks. Birds were singing, poppies blowing and the skies were high and clear.

"Follow me," Langdon said.

The ferry up was without event; and the Trente-Neuf's 'drome was where a blind man could find it. Later, Langdon and his mates were to learn that German airmen also located the place without much trouble.

"You boys," Major Mack said, "can see the highway commissioner and take out registration papers on those machines you ferried up. We've lost a few men in the past week—flu, you know—and it won't be many hours before you're out on your own. The Trente-Neuf welcomes you. It isn't much of a name, but the outfit's top-notch. Also, remember it's your home; and a home's what you make it—between drinks. And right now and here—no drinking, boys, except at mess and between meals.

"Look around now. Get to know the mechanics. Treat 'em right—the mechanics—and they'll treat you right. Don't ever forget to remember that air battles are won on the ground. You know, they say a celebrity is only a dub to his valet. That's the way up here. A cocky pilot finishes fast and quick on these strange airways. I know because I've lost several pilots in battle who were never game enough to get out of the weeds. Why, to get them, an enemy pilot would have to use telepathy.

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do, boys, and report for mess in clothes. That's all the orders we have here. If you salute me, I'll credit you with a gold star. If you don't salute me, I'll never hold it against you. This old uniform of mine is a disgraceful affair and by all rights does not rate a salaam. Go; come when you're in trouble."

The three saluted us though it were a pleasure, and went out.

"If the Trente-Neuf is like its C.O," Langdon said to his flying mates, "this dump's going to be a home. Guess we can work here."

For anybody looking for work, the place could supply the limit. Having heard that the air branch was the eyes of the Army, the Artillery, Infantry—and even the Medical Corps, through force of bad habit—were incessantly asking for observations. They did not care much what was observed, but they liked to keep the Air Service in hot water. These old line branches know how easy it is to loaf when it rains, or the fog gets too heavy; so they figure that, being the highest branch of the Service, aviation should do its stuff while others sleep. And the young branch, extending itself to the limit, made those observations; flew when flying was out of the question, and sacrificed men when men were scarce.

THAT evening, by low candles in the Trente-Neuf's mess, Langdon and his two mates met the outfit. Except for one, it was easy to know. That one, Lieutenant Charles Mudd, F.F.V., A.S., U. S. R., was hard for Langdon to meet because he had met him before.

F.F.V. Mudd and Langdon had both been assigned to the 10th Aero Squadron for shipment overseas. Together, at Mitchel Field, they had reported in to the 10th's old top-kick, Sergeant Benton; and upon reporting, when the 10th's C.O. was absent, the Old Man had had them sign the register. Langdon had signed first, and in a self-conscious way.

"Put down your rank, Lieutenant," Sergeant Dad Benton had said. "There's no misters in this man's Army. Put down your 'Lieutenant, First', and your 'A.S., U.S.R'. "

Next, Lieutenant Mudd signed. But first he found a resting place for his swagger stick, and deposited his gold tipped cigaret on the edge of Dad's blotter. And when that baby signed, he signed—and how!

"First Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd, F.F.V., A.S., U.S.R."

"What the hell's all this 'F.F.V.' stuff?" the old sergeant quizzed.

"That, suh, is, First Families of Virginia," Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd answered.

Of course, his tone of voice was the tone that should be used when a lieutenant speaks to an enlisted man. And it went just about as far as the talk of a lieutenant usually goes with an enlisted man. The old sergeant, with a stroke of the broad pen, struck out the F.F.V.

"There are no F.F.V's in this man's Army, Lieutenant Mudd."

Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd stepped back. His pale face grew even paler. The sensitive lips and chin quivered, and the flesh above his knees prickled within their well tailored confines. His breath came hard, his eyes flooded, then the proud youth fell to chewing his lower lip. The Army, uncouth thing that it is, had taken him for another ride.

Finally, deciding against mixing with a lowly sergeant, Lieutenant Mudd retrieved his swagger stick and cigaret, and strode to the door. He hesitated upon the threshold long enough to say—

"I'll report this, Sawgent."

"Report and be damned," the old topkick mused, and closed the register.

More than a quarter of a century in the service of Uncle Sam had placed Sergeant Dad Benton in a position where lieutenants, and even higher rankers, were of no more importance than the most lowly 10th Aero buck. With the ever expanding bubble that was the war of '17, wise heads of Dad's caliber were only too few. Newly made captains, suddenly advanced majors and dizzy colonels came hurriedly into the old man's council to ascertain just what gentlemen of their rank should do under this, that and the other condition. And they got their answers.

"You'll find the answer to that, sir," the old man would say, after twisting his long mustaches for maybe as much as ten seconds, "on page so and so, paragraph this or that in your Blue Book."

And how any man, even in twenty-seven years, could memorize—page and paragraph—as large a volume as Army Regulations, is beyond the understanding of one who could never remember which of two was the right foot.

So you can see, First Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd's report, if made, caused no ripple on the already troubled waters of Mitchel Field. And Mudd's report, very likely, was turned in because, in the several weeks of his stay with the 10th, the lieutenant was hard to get along with. He wanted salutes from the enlisted men. Enlisted men, though, seldom salute those who fail to command their spontaneous respect; and Mudd was out of luck.

Shortly after the 10th's arrival upon an active field in France, a plane crew sent Mudd into the air with an almost empty gasoline tank, two flying-wire turnbuckles unsafetied and a landing gear wheel loosed and ready to fall off. When the motor died at five thousand feet, Mudd came down for a landing. When he hit the ground, the right wheel bounced through his lower off-side wing and went places. The small pursuit plane, a Nieuport 27, with one wheel missing, somersaulted three times, by the count, and Mudd came up from the wreckage like an angry hen from a messed up nest. Shades of Southern hospitality and gentility! What a yell went up!

However, the 10th Aero was a good outfit. It was also a mighty useful outfit and had an important top sergeant in its orderly room.

"The whole damn' affair must have been just an accident," Dad Benton convinced the benzine board appointed to smell into Mudd's rotten charges. "Why these 10th boys are worked to death. Sixty-odd pursuit planes in the air for five periods a day. Of course now and then something is going to go wrong."

The benzine board made its report. Headquarters made a move. Mudd was the pawn. And because the 10th gang ran with every other gang at Issoudun's many fields, headquarters made the move big enough to put Mudd out of danger for all time. He, First Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd, F.F.V., was sent to observation, away from Issoudun.

NOW, with the Trente-Neuf, Langdon and Mudd were in the same outfit once again.

"How are they breaking, F.F.V?" Langdon asked.

Mudd gazed through Langdon and went to his place at table. A quiver of anticipation went through the room. And that told Langdon that Lieutenant Mudd had not changed one whit.

"You'll remember, Lieutenant Langdon," Mudd said, when he was seated, "my

Army salutation is Lieutenant Mudd."

"The hell you tell!" Langdon smiled. "Where at is your F.F.V, Charles?"

Mudd gave his attention to the meal. The table tried hard to smother its mirth, and Langdon explained—

"Lieutenant Mudd and I made our transport with the same outfit, attached to the 10th Aero—"

"The swine!" Mudd snarled.

"The best damn' air unit in France," Langdon said. "That is, with the exception of the Trente-Neuf."

"That's the spirit, Lieutenant Langdon!" Major Mack cheered from his end of the long table. "The old outfit is always good, but the new outfit, to be an outfit, must always be *the* outfit . . . Stand, devils— To the Trente-Neuf!"

"This Trente-Neuf," a man at Langdon's right said, after the toast, "is a jake outfit, Langdon. There's only one thing wrong with it."

He stopped talking and stared at Mudd.

"There was only one thing wrong with the 10th," Langdon told the man, "and it was the same thing. An outfit's mistakes are its own, and the unpardonable mistake is the mistake made when an outfit makes the mistake of not rectifying its mistakes. Am I right?"

"No mistake," the other agreed.

Next morning, Langdon went out on his first mission behind Mudd. That is, because of seniority, F.F.V. was in the front plane of a three ship flight. Now, this thing of following F.F.V. Mudd was not the worst medicine on earth, and Langdon had no kick coming. Mudd was a flying man, and that seems strange. None, no matter what his idea of manhood, could ever deny Mudd his place in air, and for more than two months now, he had been taking missions out and, what was more important, he was bringing them back. Maybe that was why the Trente-Neuf had not taken steps to clean up this one mistake.

Mudd was one of those conscientious flight leaders who gave flying orders like a pedagogue and then expected every man to do his duty. There was no fun to be found behind him. The objective was the objective, and not fun. His unit took no long chances. If enemy planes were above, Mudd toured all France on their four hour DH tanks, then came back. Came back, got the pictures or observations, and went hell bent for home. A pilot might just as well have been touring France with the "Y". And on more than one occasion, he had been told so; but not by Major Mack. No matter what the major might have thought personally, he stood firmly behind Mudd because of results shown. The business of an observation squadron is observation. Let the pursuit groups do the combat stuff.

This first Front line flight of Langdon's was the quietest thing imaginable. Not an enemy craft crossed their skies. He wondered where these comebacks from the Front got all their stuff about dog fights, painted circuses and German infested ceilings. And as he followed Mudd, above territory that should have been bad, he recalled what Rube Williamson had told them, back at Issoudun.

"Hun planes! Never saw a single Hun plane in two weeks' flying. Maybe they're there for some, but they were not there for me." And now they were not there for Langdon.

At the end of the eastward mission, Mudd, with the observations on the cuff, signaled for a turn and back home push. Then, for about ten minutes, Langdon kept the other two planes close in where they belonged and began to look about to see what he could see. They came above a road that was jammed with the properties of Germany's late summer try. Without a great deal of thought, Langdon parted company, dropped down from Mudd's six thousand feet elevation and went to strafing the enemy activities.

IT WAS fun. It was war. It was more like it. He turned to his observer—a Lieutenant Akeley—and winked. Akeley stood up on his stool, bent over Langdon's shoulder, and yelled:

"Go back and give 'em hell! When you come in above that little burg where they were eating—where all the smoke was—sideslip and let me get a crack at 'em with my gun. Hop to it!"

Langdon looked for his two companion planes. Mudd and the other had gone ahead. For a moment he might have hesitated. This thing of pulling a private strafe while detailed on a mission would not be considered exactly good. But being a strong youth, Langdon weakened. He flew a turn and went back along the German supply road.

Where he found the field kitchens smoking, Langdon climbed to about five hundred feet. From that altitude, with the nose of his plane high, he slipped right and gave Akeley his chance with the rear gun. At the same time, watching his slip, he also watched Akeley and cheered the gunner above the roar of slipping struts and wires. At a hundred feet or less, he kicked out of the slip, redressed his ship, whaled full motor to the craft and flew across the concentration of troops—and through a hail of rifle fire . . . Akeley went back to the Trente-Neuf a corpse in Langdon's rear pit.

At sunset, Jack Langdon sat upon his heels before a hangar, smoked, and tried to figure out the whole thing. Within the hangar at his back, under a tarpaulin, was the quiet Akeley. A short distance away, where the sun's light was yet available, Trente-Neuf mechanics worked at patching thirty-seven holes in Langdon's DH. The mechanics talked and wondered why that new bird, Langdon, did not get bumped too.

Within his quarters, till the evening's dusk gave way to dark, Lieutenant Mudd, martinet at heart, worked assidously upon his report. He missed supper in its completion; then with the several pages in hand, the conscientious one straightened his blouse, put a rag to his boots, strapped on his Sam Browne and went toward Major Mack's room. On the way, Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd detoured only once, and this detour sent him past the enlisted men's quarters where the longers were forced to snap into it and deliver the salute.

"Too bad, Lieutenant Mudd," Mack said as he received the report. "Hell, I liked Akeley. We'll miss him. The whole Trente-Neuf will miss his mandolin of evenings."

"It was murder!" Mudd snarled. "This man Langdon— It was murder, sir!"

"But Sergeant Rictor—" the armorer of the Trente-Neuf—"reported that Bob had fired several hundred rounds. His gun was still warm when Lieutenant Langdon returned," Major Mack protested. "And you know Bob Akeley, Lieutenant. If he had a chance to go out like that, in action, why, the boy was at a feast with a fork in each hand."

This glorification of personal thrill was not for Mudd. Wordless, white and a-tremble, he weaved on the threshold and tried again and again for words. In the end, he said:

"You have my full report, sir. A flight leader must have unbending discipline, sir."

Major Mack walked toward the window. Then, because there was nothing else he could do, he walked back.

"Lieutenant Mudd," he said. "Send Lieutenant Langdon to me."

Major Mack was still pacing when Langdon knocked, came in and reported. The Major eyed the pilot and paced once more to the east window, then he paced back and eyed Langdon once more.

"What have you got to say, Lieutenant?" the superior finally asked.

"Not a word, sir." Langdon fought hard to swallow his grief. "I know I've pulled a star boner. Guess I've had my war—been hired, fed and fired all in a day, sir."

"Whose idea was it, Langdon?"

"Mine, sir. As yet, I can't always remember that I have another man behind me. Observers weren't in my first schooling, sir."

"Even if the thing were excusable, Lieutenant, you should have asked Akeley what he thought of the plan."

"Yes, sir."

"Maybe you did."

"No, sir. I just got the idea that I could do damage on that road, so I shoved down the nose and went. Then we got together, Akeley and I. He said—

" 'Go back and give 'em hell!' And we went."

"I thought that was it!" Major Mack smiled. "Langdon, ever since Bob Akeley came to this squadron, at least twice a day he's been in here trying to talk me into turning the squadron to pursuit. Of course we can't sanction such doings, Langdon. And for my own part, I wouldn't pull such a strafe. No, I'm a little too old and slow on the controls. You see, I like to have a little more space between my wheels and the ground. But I'm not so old as to be unable to appreciate the finesse of the thing and, Lieutenant, if we could roll back time, and circumstance would place Langdon in Mack's place, and Mack in Langdon's— Well, that road would have been strafed today. Maybe not as good, but after a fashion at least.

"NOW, Lieutenant, I'm neither going to call out a firing squad nor mark you on the ground. Between you and me, aviation, as the eyes of artillery, doesn't carry even the weight of a good joke. I'm an old artillerist myself, Langdon, and I know. So if we can wage any kind of a war of our own, I'm not going to stand in the way of progress. You understand, Langdon, I am not authorizing, sanctioning or legalizing future side trips; but in your own right, you are in command of one ship while off the ground. Orders, the best orders ever made, were only made to be broken. And so long as they are broken without going into the red, when it's all over, there's no kick coming. In other and fewer words—be sure you're right, then go ahead and don't slip up. The quick are always right in war, Langdon. But it is far better that the quick be dead than be wrong.

"Now, there's one observer in the Trente-Neuf with whom I want you to become well acquainted. It is Lieutenant Samter. Samter, during such times as Bob Akeley wasn't pestering me, has spent much wind trying to show me where and how this outfit might run up a big record in combat victories. He's of the opinion that an observer should only observe when there's no fighting to be done. And he can do things with that rear machine gun, Langdon. Sergeant Rictor tells me that Samter has shown him more trick stuff than he's ever seen before. And Sergeant Rictor has been an armorer for upward of fifteen years. If you and Samter find that you have much in common, come to me and we'll talk it over. No reason at all why he shouldn't hold down your rear stool on all flights . . . English fags, they are. Take a couple with you, Lieutenant."

Late into that night, Langdon and Samter talked. And they discovered that they had just about everything in common, including a rotten opinion of one Charles Surry Mudd, F.F.V. Lieutenant Samter had been riding behind Mudd a great deal of late, and the war had lost its flavor.

"I'd rather hold on to the rear saddle of a motorbike with an enlisted stiff chewing hard on the handlebars," he told Langdon. "All of the white haired boy's good flying is wasted. And I'll say old F.F.V. can pilot. But what's the use of being behind him—just going the route, delivering the milk and coming home? There's more thrill working at kitchen police where you have the ever present danger of cutting your finger while paring spuds, eh?"

"Sure," Langdon agreed. "The C.O. gave me these cigs. They're English. Ain't they rotten, what?"

"I wouldn't walk a mile," Samter answered, "unless it was to get away from such smokes."

The next day it rained and the new team worked ship. Langdon and the Trente-Neuf's head rigger washed out the outer bays of all four wings. Also they took out one of each pair of outside flying wires.

"They don't need all these wires," the rigger agreed. "Each one of these cables has a breaking strength of more than two thousand pounds. When would you ever get such a load on a wing? Same way with the landing gear. You know how to set these babies down, Lieutenant. I watched you when you brought Akeley in yesterday. You wouldn't have broken an egg, so we'll pull out all the extras and that will help to speed the crate up too.

"We'll do some streamlining on her, too. I'm glad to get a chance to see what can be done about pepping up a DH. I always argued that something could be done. They ain't such dead culls. They'll maneuver if you'll help 'em."

Samter and Rictor put hour after hour on the two guns. That DH had surely fallen into good hands. Toward the end of day they flushed the water radiator, drained the old and refilled with new motor oil, cleaned ignition heads, and the ship was set. Then they prayed for a morrow full of flying weather.

Next morning, September the twenty-third, Langdon and Samter mooched their way into a real mêlée above the road from La Harazee, where the 77th Division was convoying guns through to the Bois des Hautes Batis. That fight, by rights, belonged to the pursuit gang. It was no place for a DH. But when Langdon and Samter pulled out, they had done damage enough to justify a bid for confirmation on two enemy planes. Their ship had been hit seven times, and Samter once. But his was just a minor rap, only a little job for the squadron doctor.

ON THE day following, the two wild men accounted for three of eight German observation balloons that had hung above the main road through the Vesle. And Langdon and Samter were beginning their traditional climb toward lasting air fame.

On October the thirteenth, divisional headquarters called for a rock bound verification on all observations covering that tough stretch of road between Grand Pré and St. Juvin. It had been a hard line to bend—that German stronghold along the northern bank of the Aire; but now, one way or the other, it was not only going to be bent, but broken—and completely.

Mudd, with four following ships, and covered from above by twelve pursuit planes, went out to do the job. They were nearly above Grand Pré before hell broke loose; and they were past St. Juvin and making a turnabout before the first Hun ship broke the high defense and took a DH off the Trente-Neuf's rear.

With his remaining three, stiff lipped and obstinate, Mudd flew his turn and went down the St. Juvin-Grand Pré line for a return whirl. Then a second DH fell, and Langdon broke out with combat, quit formation, and won another Boche ship from the milling group.

Lieutenant Charles Surry Mudd worked long and late upon another report. Then Major Mack paced late and long into the night and tried hard to be a good fellow and, at the same time, a good soldier. Which is a thing well nigh impossible. In the end, he called all six who had returned. All of Mudd's five companions, including Mudd's own observer, swore by all that might have been holy that Langdon, in quitting formation and taking on combat, had only done so to cover the successful retreat of the camera planes. And Charles Surry, F.F.V, went into the night talking to himself and kicking stones. That war was a war for him.

Langdon and Samter, listening to the guns that were pouring it into Grand Pré and the road to the east, waited impatiently for the morrow.

"This damn' swagger stick dude of a muddy Mudd!" Samter said from his shakedown. "If the simple minded, simpering juvenile does anything more to tear down our meat house, Jack, I'll work him over with a prop wrench on my own time. Reports for the major! He'll make one more report to the Old Man and I'll land on him so hard that his brains, if any, will detonate and blow some he-man color into his insipid map.

"F. F. V—Far From Vodka, Finest Fish Vender, Faint Falsetto Voice—I'll F.F.V. the white haired, white livered rat!"

"Check — a madman," Langdon laughed. "Roll over, Samter, and tear off some sleep. Charles F.F.V. is the least of our many worries. And he's a good enough gun, One Wing. The only thing is, you and I are fighting a different war. On the level, Mudd's scrap is gamer than ours. His is an impersonal *guerre;* and he doesn't even keep a diary."

"A good drunk is what Mudd needs," Samter decided. "A trip to town, a big town, a good drunk and—"

"That's a two or three motored ship, and she's mighty close," Langdon said, as they caught the throb and pump of a night flyer. "Wish we were doing night missions, too."

"Ambitious guy," Samter said to his inflated pillow. "When would Mudd find time to write lengthy reports?"

"It really doesn't make much difference," Langdon said to his blanket, "because nobody ever reads them anyway."

During the following days, as the line pushed up through Champigneulle, St. Georges, Alliepont and on to Verpel, the two wild men, for the greater part, went it alone. Major Mack heard Mudd's bleat often, but the major was too busy to bother himself with such minor distractions. This war was what men like Mack had lived a life for. Mudd could not be expected to see this; and Mack made no effort toward proselyting F.F.V's conversion to the cause of Langdon, Samter—and, if the truth must be known, Mack.

THE MAJOR was on the wing a great deal during those busy days. With his own eyes, he saw Langdon knock an enemy craft out of the skies behind Buzancy, and follow a second out of sight toward Stonne and the Meuse.

"Yes, sir," Major Mack told Mudd upon his return to the 'drome. "That heller of a Langdon went down on a Fokker. And when the Hun fell into a spin, after Langdon's first burst, the kid sideslipped right with him and Samter poured his load from the rear gun. They had the poor devil burning through the last two thousand feet. The second plane they picked on was doing observations near Harricourt."

"But it's not consistent, sir!" Lieutenant Mudd insisted.

"But hell, Lieutenant," Mack said, "it is strictly American, you know. And when we take this out of the Yank youth, we're eternally lost."

So Major Mack continued to make allowances for one of his planes which had no more right in an observation outfit, than has a free balloon in a pursuit squadron.

On the third of November Langdon got a German ship which was busily strafing roads near Authe; and on the fourth he accounted for a like worker near Oches.

"The damn' gorillas—strafing our troops!" he said to Samter, as they regassed their ship at ten o'clock that morning.

Then, reserviced, the two went directly into the air and strafed roads as far back as La Neuville and Raucourt.

In his own way, Mudd was making history through the long hours of those crowded days. Time and again, even with his overhead defense shot to pieces, he made requested observations along the Meuse. He located ambushes near La Bessage and Le Vivier and dropped warning notes to the infantry. On a hill above a graveyard in Raucourt, there was a machine gun and anti-aircraft nest. Mudd wiped it out. Twice in four days he brought dead observers home in his rear pit. And on one of those trips he had landed his burning plane on the long hillside slope before Champigneulle.

"But why the hell doesn't he stay and fight?" Samter argued. "Every slug hole in his linen is frayed to the front. Dead observers are of no use to anybody. They're not worth a dollar a thousand . . . Langdon, if I ever see a slug coming into the rear of your crate, I'll spray you with my own gun just to teach you a lesson."

"And I'll pile you up surer'n hell if you do!" Langdon promised.

There was no freebooting on the seventh. Artillery and infantry wanted to learn all there was to be known of the bridges on, and the terrain adjacent, the Meuse. Headquarters told the Trente-Neuf to "go get it". And, behind Mudd, Langdon and four other pilots—three of them green—took off.

At Villers Devant Mouzon, a detachment of engineers were doing their best to throw a path across the Meuse. The German machine gun nests and snipers were making of the job a nasty detail, till Mudd's flight put an end to those ambushes.

At Remilly, a like detachment was having a still harder time. And the covering aerial defense was no enviable task. Before the first four hour patrol had ended, two of Mudd's new men had limped back to the 'drome with motor trouble, and one had been driven down a few kilometers east of the river by an enemy pursuit plane. Mudd and Langdon, close at hand, had seen that Trente-Neuf pilot burn his ship before he was taken prisoner by ground troops. Then, still behind the lines, the two had turned back toward the river.

There was a heavy sky that day, November 7, and anything in the way of altitude had been out of the question. But now, here and there, the blue was breaking through and showing a higher ceiling. Suddenly, out of this clearer sky, a bi-motored enemy craft crossed their line of flight. Langdon jumped it. After a few seconds of thought, outclassed by the faster Yank, the enemy ship turned east. And the eager Langdon hung on. Mudd, after a moment, followed. Samter, as Langdon came down on the big ship's tail again, thumped Langdon on the back and pointed to Mudd.

"Old F.F.V. himself," Samter yelled. "He's going to pile on with us. Now there *will* be a war!"

But war and a personal battle were not Mudd's concerns. Coming east from the Meuse, he had spotted two Hun pursuit planes that had seen Langdon and the bomber.

Mudd was pretty well off to the south, and the pair of single-seater Germans came down on Langdon before he could work into position. With the first burst of lead, Samter crumpled, shot through both legs. He fought to stay, clinging tenaciously to his machine gun mount. He pulled a belt from his flying suit, passed it through and around the gun scarf and worked his way to a standing position. Langdon had dived and slipped; now he zoomed and flew a wing-over. They came back under the pursuing planes—and Samter got one as they went by.

In a moment Langdon was crowding down on the bomber and single pursuit ship again. And just when he came into position, his gun jammed. The German seemed to realize his predicament; they passed the laugh from ship to ship. That was a mistake on their part; it made Langdon angry.

THE SPEED of the chase was the speed of the big ship out front. The combat plane easily maintained a position between the pursuing DH and the huge German, thus further increasing Langdon's rage.

For a few minutes, as they flew in line, the American thought hard. Then he gained a little altitude, and with it under him, he threw full power to his motor, went into a long dive and closed the distance between him and the pursuit plane. Before the German knew what was up, Langdon had hooked his left lower wingtip into the right side of the lighter craft. The latter's single interwing N-strut came out, and half his lower wing went with it. That pilot was finished with the war.

But Langdon's ship could not go through such a high speed collision without damage. He had counted on losing a few feet of wingtip. If only that much were wiped off, a pilot could carry the difference of lateral stability by using full rudder on the opposite side from the wing so damaged. Also the use of aileron would help offset the loss of wing lift. But he had lost more than was good for the wing balance of any plane. He was in a bad situation.

They had crashed at five thousand feet. Fighting to hold up the clipped lower left wing, he flew a flat turn to the right, covered a great deal of space and started back for the Meuse. But, even with full right rudder and his control stick clear to the side, he was losing altitude. He had to lose altitude in order to remain at all level. Two or three times, in the following five minutes, he came very close to falling into a spin. Each time, he dived, gained high speed and fought the craft out of its wing drag.

Here and there along the Chiers River, the anti-aircraft outfits were sending up feelers for Langdon. Even the machinegun crews were putting steel through his ship as he crossed the highest spots.

Finally he had Mairy just ahead and off to the right. It looked as though he would come to earth and pile up some place between the town and the Meuse; and as yet, the east bank of the river was in enemy hands. The war was just about over for two willing young men and . . .

Langdon had been watching Mairy, to his right. All of a sudden the weight came off his weak left side. He stared, full of bewilderment, for Mudd's right wings were tucked under his damaged panels and carrying the load. That, for Langdon and Samter, was the grandest moment of life.

Both motors now roared full on. They lost no more altitude and the river became more than just a possibility.

Samter, still hanging on his belt, shook his head and fainted. Langdon made sure that it was Lieutenant Charles F.F.V, shook his head and tended strictly to his flying. The Meuse came closer, and Archie came up oftener. The war was as good as over for the enemy, but they still had a goodly amount of ammunition on hand and they were throwing most of it toward Langdon and Mudd. But that did not worry Langdon now. The river was only a matter of short kilometers. Soon F.F.V. would be working on his report.

"And he's got me with my suspenders cut," Langdon found time to reflect. "Hell, who ever heard of such a dumb thing as an intentional collision on the wing! Collisions are strictly for high rankers and to be made only upon takeoff and landing.

"They'll ground me for this sure. I might even draw a bobtail. And old kid Charlie Mudd . . ."

As suddenly as he had arrived, Mudd left. A rifle shot from the east bank of the Meuse had found him. His plane, with dead hands and feet on the controls, spun into the river.

* * *

FROM the dressing station where Langdon sat, richly swathed in iodine soaked wrappings, he could watch the engineers fishing for a pilot and observer where the rudder of a plane waved above the surface of the Meuse. On a cot, where a few medical men had been busy for an hour, Samter was showing the first signs of returning consciousness. Now and then the observer had said, in delirium:

"F.F.V. Old F.F.V, himself."

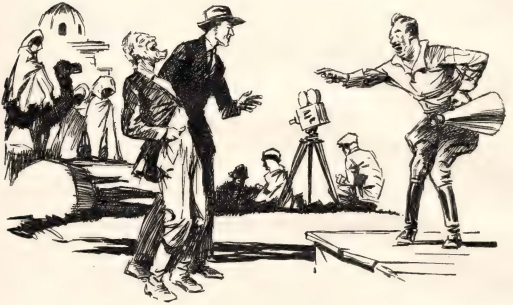
"We used to have one of them in this corps," a medical private said. "He was from Norfolk, I think. That F.F.V. stuff stands for First Families of Virginia."

"Right you are," Langdon mused, from where he sat.

"Wrong as hell," Samter mused. "It stands for Fell Flying Valiantly."

The FOUR HORSEMEN

By HARRY G. HUSE



Dry Land Dawson hitches his wagon to a star—in Hollywood

WE SPOKE of furrow drills and two man combines; of Ed Hyatt's new pure bred milking Shorthorn bull, and of Limpy Bucklin's boy—the lazy left handed one that was back from the East, from St. Joe it was, or perhaps Omaha, with pointed sideburns and a chiropractor's license.

"Jest wrastles your backbone," said Dry Land, "and cures whatever's the matter of you, from long standing salt rheum to fresh carbuncles and bone felons."

In time we came, by way of a recent wedding—"orange blossoms growed from a slip," according to the old homesteader, whose native delicacy shrank from the current explanation of the affair—to the neighborhood's lighter social activities and that topic of perennial interest—the past year's quota of new school teachers, their labors and their triumphs in these fallow Montana fields.

"Generally, on the occasion of your visits," said Dry Land, casting a handful of sal soda into the dishwater, "I have been able to mingle a little high toned romance with my accounts of life as now lived on these here Western plains."

He paused to test the steaming water with a gnarled and knowing index finger, then reached for the tin dipper in the bucket beside him.

"In times past, as I say," he continued mildly, "I have generally been able to enliven our conversation by supplying a ringside, blow by blow account of the major engagements, from the time the party-line subscribers hear the new schoolma'am has just been drove into the yard and is gitting down out of the county superintendent's Ford coup, and has got a shingle bob and is wearing a mulberry sport ensembley with shorter skirts and more rouge than last year's, down to the closing exercises in the spring, and the fancy towel and kitchen tinware showers that precedes the June nooptials."

He broke off to sigh profoundly and point out the dishtowels on an ingenious rack behind the kitchen range.

"This year, however, I am able to provide only the bare statistics that five out of a possible eight was successful, and that four former single men and one sod widower are now having to scrape their feet at the kitchen door, and keep their shoes on evenings, and are otherwise being domestically looked after."

Had he, I asked, strangely lost his flair for the social contacts of the wheat benches, or been crippled with rheumatism or something?

"Absent," he explained simply. "Roaming far afield, as the feller says. Observing human nature and its didoes in other climes. Cutting a few capers my own self for the amusement and edification of the masses."

"Helena, and the State Legislature," I suggested.

"Worse," he replied. "California! The land of everlasting sunshine, cafeterias, Ford seedans, glass bottomed boats, horseshoe pitching matches and State picnics. Hollywood, California—and the moving pitchers."

He fell silent, engrossed with his shame and a blackened skillet.

"A wasted winter," he mused. "Or, at any rate, almost wasted. A sacrifice laid on the altar of old time friendship. A dreary round, as the feller says, of sophisticated pleasures."

He shook his head lugubriously above the clashing kitchen ware. Only the lift of his shoulders and the mellow gleam in his faded blue eyes belied his air of melancholy.

"I have always held strong sentiments," began the old homesteader, when we were tilted back against the whitewashed cottonwood logs outside, watching night deepen in the distant Highwoods, "ag'in the tendency of tired agerculturists to end their days dry rotting in what is termed the Golden State.

"IT HAS been my pride since them doleful days of 1910 when the open range went the way of the buffalo and Injun, and roundups begun to be held in ball parks, to have been able to stand out ag'in the lure of sun kissed bungalows, bathing beauties and new real estate subdivisions, and to have kept mind and body soople trying to raise wheat where it still ain't any too certain that the Almighty intended wheat should be raised.

"In them sad days to which I have referred, when the dry landers was coming in by trainloads and you couldn't ride a mile in any direction without hitting a new barb' wire fence, it become necessary for me to bid farewell to a roan cow horse and a low fork, rim fire saddle that hadn't their equal north of the Missouri, and also to one of the homeliest, hardest riding, unluckiest poker playing human friends a man ever had.

"His name was Gentry—Orville O. Gentry—and he had sandy red hair and a snub nose and would have stood about five foot three in his stocking feet if it hadn't been ag'in one of his principles to wear socks. During the days of his freedom, when he was riding range and passing his earnings freely to one and all across a pegged out blanket, he was knowed familiarly as Bobtail—from his small size and the brand of flushes he generally held. Then one spring he got dyspeptic and lonely and sentimental, and married the Widow Bannister, that he was working for as foreman. After that he was Orville to the widow, and Double O to the half dozen other suitors that had their eyes on her Badger Butte ranch.

"With the coming of so many dry landers, anybody that used his head for anything besides plumping out the sweatband of a Stetson could see the end of the cattle business. The widow, who'd always had horse sense, sold out while there was still a market for her place, and set to work gentling Orville up to the idea of pulling out for California. They'd got enough now and more too, she pointed out, to keep them comfortable if they didn't go into high society which wasn't likely, Orville being too fond of chewing tobacco and having them prejudices ag'in white collars and socks.

"Orville put up a good fight, and held out ag'in the proposition as long as he was able. Hell, he said, he'd ruther stay here and herd sheep. He wouldn't even be able to do that, the widow showed him. From now on there wasn't going to be nothing herded around here but jackrabbit breaking plows; and that kind of work was going to be hard on a little sawed off feller with high heeled boots and bowlegs.

"He put up a good battle, all things considered. When it become evident the widow'd had her mind made up all along and was jest giving him rope to make him feel manly and independent, he weakened and said he'd go if I'd go too. The widow suggested that, being to home with livestock, the two of us might like to go into the White Leghorn chicken business.

"Bobtail pleaded with me something desperate. I admit I was tempted. Spite of his having got married, him and me was still thicker'n a pair of cattle rustlers, and we didn't see how we was going to git along without each other. But I'd got my dander up listening to all the croakers saying the ruination of the country was in sight, and that a cattleman couldn't make a go of it wheat farming. I'd already filed on the best half section in the county and was reading dry farming bulletins and taking practise lessons gitting around on my own two feet instead of a horse's four. It was a sad situation. There was days of indecision and nights of anguish, as the song feller says, but in the end I stuck to Montana, and Bobtail and me said a sad farewell and our destinies was parted.

"We corresponded regular during all the time of our separation, writing on the average of once a year. Like a couple of fellers will, we lied to each other purty heavy. Bobtail's gone into the real estate and insurance business in a small way to keep hisself busy. He makes out like he's having a big time sashaying around amongst the orange groves and oil wells in a automobile the widow's bought, and going to theaters nights, and looking at the purty girls, and drinking tony liquor. I do considerable bragging about the forty bushel crops I'm raising and about having become a leader in the gay social life that springs up among the new settlers.

"He keeps threatening to visit me and I threaten to visit him, but we don't neither of us ever git around to it. The widow's keeping a firm rein on him, I guess, and far's I'm concerned what with drouth and being hailed out and having my wheat winter-kill, I got all I can do to keep one jump ahead of my mortgages.

"IT RUNS on like that until late last summer. Then I git a letter from Bobtail that sounds real low and unhappy. He's had about all he can stand, he says. Him and the widow have made more money than they'll ever need in real estate without hardly lifting a finger, and life's got to be nothing but sleeping on a coil spring bed and riding around at twenty miles an hour on concrete roads where you couldn't find a bump in a hunderd miles, and bragging about the weather and gitting dragged to moving pitcher shows where the stars appear in person and tell how good they are in voices that sound like they got their mouths full of hot mush.

"He'd like to git away and come see me, but being a married man he can't leave the widow. Anyway, he says he guesses it would make him feel lower and more despondent to see the old range messed up with farmers, and all the landmarks covered up with growing wheat. He hints in his letter he's so gloomy he may decide to end all if I don't value our old-time friendship enough to come down and spend the winter with him.

"His letter strikes me during a moment of weakness. I'm harvesting a good crop, and feeling a little jaundiced from eating too much of my own cooking, and facing the job of rebanking my house and gitting new winter underwear if I'm going to stay here during the cold weather. I give the matter as careful thought as I'm able, being warmed up and made sentimental by the low feeling plea in Bobtail's letter, and first thing I know I've wrote him I'll come and am gitting my old Ford tinkered up for the long trip.

"I will pass over lightly the hardships of my journey. There's a lot of mountains between here and Hollywood for a man that's driving a 1916 Ford and ain't never felt to home in it like he would back of a team of horses. I must have bailed half the cricks this side of the mountains dry, keeping water in my radiator climbing up over the Continental Divide; and I et heavily into the visible supply of brake bands on the other side going down. I'd got me a camping outfit and the nights was cold enough to make a man feel lonesome and homesick. The season was late and there wasn't hardly nobody in the tourist camps to visit with.

"It wasn't until I got over into Utah that I run into what you might call a congenial human being. His name was Fillow—Alonzo B. Fillow—but right away he asked me to call him Lon, which was what he'd gone by back in Idaho before they cut the sagebrush and ruined the country.

"He was a long thin feller, kind of bent in the middle like it was from stooping down to be able to hear what average size people was saying. He'd been born and raised on a Snake River ranch and was a saddle maker by trade. He'd knowed lean days when irrigation come in, and for a while had had to turn his hand, he said, to bartending. That went back on him too, when prohibition come in, and he'd have been on the county sure, he reckoned, if the movies and the rodeos and the dude ranches hadn't opened up a big new market for his handiwork. As it was he'd gone back to his trade and made big money making saddles and chaps and leather cuffs for the growing army of part time cowboys.

"He's done so well he's retired and is now on his way, ag'in his better judgment, to spend the winter with his daughter in Los Angeles.

"Lon's camping along same as me, with an outfit he's got out of a mail order catalog, and he complains likewise about the cold nights. So we team up and bunk together.

"It's a one sided arrangement, there not being much warmth in one of these thin fellers, and that bend in his middle taking up a lot of room in bed no matter which way it's pointed. But he's been mellowed by life's trials and tribulations, as the feller says, and he sure knows how to visit. We hold the same views on important subjects like horse liniment for rheumatism, and sleeping in your underwear, and a chew of tobacco in bed before gitting up in the morning, and time we're across the desert and down through California, seems like we've knowed each other for the last twenty years.

"We exchange addresses our last night together, and promise to look each other up after we git settled, and say goodby the next morning with many a parting pang of genuine regret.

"Well, I found Bobtail a changed and almost ruined man. If I hadn't arrived at his place in an overhet condition from trying to figger out red and green lights and watch street signs and being spoke to rough by other drivers and policemen, I sure would have been took right off my feet by the deterioration that's took place in Orville. It ain't so much the things that are visible to the naked eye, though they are plenty, like his being bald all but a ring of red hair that looks like a halo busted in half and pushed down on to his ears, and a little pussy stomach swelling out his vest, and wearing baggy boy's pants with fancy colored checkered stockings. It's other things, like a nervous way he's got of fussing about trifles, and a useless kind of a look in his eyes.

"WE AIN'T no more than shook hands before he starts worrying about gitting my Ford in off the street and hid away in his garage. You couldn't blame him much because the Ford was party dusty, and I had most of the camping outfit tied on it here and there and a couple of fenders fastened up with baling wire. Setting out there on the tidy concrete street in front of the widow's big house, alongside the green grass and the palm trees, it does look considerable like a feller in overalls at a high toned society party. But I can remember the time when Bobtail would have stepped up in his red undershirt to shake hands with the President of the United States, if he'd have felt like it.

"We ain't no more than got the Ford tucked away until he starts fidgeting about my bath. I'd be dirty after my ride, he says, and probably the first thing I'd like to do would be to git under the shower. It'll refresh me, he says.

"I ain't worrying about a bath, and as for refreshment, the ideas me and Bobtail once held in common on that subject hadn't got nothing to do with water. But it seemed like I had to take it to please him, and I near drowned myself when I lost my footing on the shiny white floor and cast myself where I caught the full force of the faucet.

"We got around after all to a drink for old time's sake. But it took Bobtail a half hour to make it. A man brought up to tilt his head and dump in his liquor before it got a chance to raise blisters on his lips, would have been drunk and sobered up ag'in by the time he'd poured and measured and squeezed lemons and oranges into a silver contraption and shook it and poured out small sized samples in long stemmed glasses. Offering such a mixture to a traveler that'd come across a desert to git there seemed nothing short of cruel, and I suggests to Bobtail that we go down to the nearest drug store and git the boy to throw us together a big wicked sarsapriller for the next one.

"It ain't until we've had a half dozen samples out of that shaker, and it begins to appear the clear stuff Bobtail poured into it out of a bottle must of been something besides mineral water, that things begin to seem natural and old time like.

"Bobtail looks at me and I look at him, and he smiles a kind of a sad smile and waves the hand that ain't holding his drink around him in a hopeless, heartbroke manner.

" 'You see me as I have become,' he says. 'Me that was once hell on horseback and poison to outlaw cayuses! Golf pants and a clean shave every morning. Oriental rugs on the floor,' he says, still gesturing, 'and lace curtains at all the windows. A bird in a gilded cage—none the less sorrerful because it happens to be a oldish he-bird. Here I am,' he says. 'Me that was once a man, plumb ruined, nothing but a perfect lady's home companion!

" 'Hell!' I says, trying to make believe what he's said ain't the horrid truth. 'Hell!' I says. 'You old coyote! You ain't ruined. You may be a little pussy and a little bald and your clothes and manners ain't no longer very vy-rile. But there's still some fire in your eye. You're still a long ways,' I says, 'from being ruined.'

"He shakes his head and we have another drink.

" 'You don't know,' he goes on, 'the sum total of my ruination. Here I spent the last fifteen years gitting refined and living up to the widow's ideas of what a man ought to be. She's gentled me down from what I was when I courted and won her, to what you see me now—a man that don't cuss, don't spit, drinks his liquor out of a silver can and even wears pajamas. By ways only a woman knows she's got me down, little by little, to where I'm fussy as a old maid and tame as a church and got no more vices than a canary. Then what does she do?' he says.

"I ain't able to guess, the widow as I remember her, being a woman that's equal to almost anything. So we have another drink.

"'I'll tell you what she does,' says Bobtail, waving the silver shaker which is now empty. 'Who says there's any reason in women? I'll tell you what she does. She turns ag'in me. She gits tired of her own handiwork, and goes plumb nutty about a big manly, noble acting he-man moving pitcher actor!'

"Before Bobtail can eloocidate any further on his sorrow or I can offer him my sympathy, the front door slams and in comes the widow. She looks much the same as I'd remembered, only she don't seem to have so much boozom and her hair is bobbed and she's got on short skirts and these here stockings that look like you ain't wearing any. She's jest come from some feller with a fancy sounding name that means he's a corn doctor, and she walks tender footed like a horse that's jest been brought in off the grass. But she gives me a hearty welcome, and says I'm like a breath of invigorating air blowed in off the old range, and seems real glad I've come to tone up Bobtail. Stead of jumping on us for having consorted with liquor, she mixes up a fresh batch so's she can h'ist one with us. It comes as a surprise to me, 'cause I can remember her having took the jug away from us many's the time back there to Badger Butte, and shut us down in the cyclone cellar. I set it down to stylishness, and the more liberal attitude toward liquor that come in with prohibition.

"THE WIDOW ain't been in the house a half hour before we're setting down to a big meal of first class vittles. I think it's one of these triumphs of the modern housewife in the modern kitchen that you'll read about in the ladies' magazines, and make some gallant remarks to the widow about her speed in setting out such toney chuck on such short notice. But it turns out she can't take none of the credit except for hustling the stuff home while it was still hot from a delicatessen store around the corner.

"All during the supper the widow, she's telling us about the pitcher she's been to see before she went to the corn doctor's, and about the big masculine hero in it who lives right there in Hollywood and whose name is Desmond Carruthers. When she mentions his name and tells how strong and manly and vy-rile he is, Bobtail lets out a kind of hollow groan. But he sets there and takes it like a calf being branded.

"After supper me and Bobtail kind of circulate around the premises while the widow's stacking up the dishes for a girl to come in the next morning and do. This bungalow of the Gentrys' has got a real nice front porch looking out on a little patch of green grass and palm trees and the houses across the street. I'm feeling full and comfortable, and desirous of gitting settled down with our feet up on the porch rail and gitting started on the visiting we got to do to take up the slack in fifteen years, and having Bobtail tell me all about the neighbors that are watering their lawns with garden hoses and setting on their porches and gitting in and out of cars that's drawed up along the curb.

"But we ain't got time for that now. They're going to take me riding and show me some sights for a treat. I been riding for the last couple of weeks and looking at nothing but sights on both sides of a couple of mountain ranges. But there ain't nothing to do but watch Bobtail herd his car out of the garage and wipe the spots of dust off it with a piece of chamois leather. It's a new seedan and is bright and shiny and got little fancy curtains to the windows. Bobtail don't talk to it nor cuss it none while he's backing out, the way you'll expect from a man that's been brought up with horses.

"Once we git off the street where the

Gentrys live and out on a high toned street called a boulevard, we're in a string of cars like a funeral procession. We move along slow, breathing burnt gasoline, with the widow asking me to pay attention to the swell homes of the moving pitcher actors we're passing, and pointing out with special pride the elegant home of this here feller she's already mentioned—this Desmond Carruthers. Bobtail, he'll try to change the subject now and then by pointing out civic improvements and acting like he's proud of the way Hollywood is gitting bigger and better. But he can't hold up ag'in the widow, who's relating everything there is to know about the movie stars, from all the films they ever played in down to their personal tastes in rouge, dogs, underwear and lovers.

"Well, I don't take no pleasure in that evening, nor for that matter, in the three, four weeks that followed. Bobtail, as I say, was a changed and almost ruined man. I have a hard time figgering it all out. He'd let out such a yelp for company in that letter he wrote me that I thought all along he was counting on me bringing him the breath of the great plains and jarring him out of his tiresome tracks. He'd spoke up so free his own self about what's wrong with him that time when we had our first drink together, that I got the idea he was all ready to cut loose and stir up some new excitement. But shucks! He's so set in his ways he don't really want to change. All he wants is company in his misery.

"Take the matter of clothes. He points out real tactful that the mail order suit I arrived in ain't hardly suitable for all occasions, and leads me down to a place called a toggery and tries to git me into a pair of them little boy's pants. He not only don't no longer carry and use chewing tobacco, but kind of flinches every time he sees me looking around for a place to spit, which is purty often, cuspidors not having had a place in the Gentry home for a dozen years and the glass vases in the seedan being intended for flowers. He even tries to git me to lay abed until seven or eight o'clock in the mornings.

"The hardest thing of all is the everlasting sightseeing him and the widow feel they got to do to keep me entertained. The sights is all right, but everywhere we go it gits on my nerves seeing so many other people jest like us doing nothing in such a fussy, important manner.

"WHEN we stay to home it ain't no better. Bobtail's plumb forgot how to visit. Him and the widow have long ago give up poker playing for this game called bridge, and they don't drink no liquor only before meals. They're so took up with the system they got worked out for killing time that it don't seem possible to squeeze in nothing else. The widow, she keeps busy going to hair dressers and the corn doctor's and reading moving pitcher magazines. Bobtail, he tinkers with that seedan and keeps it shined up and frets about its scratches, and mows and waters his little patch of lawn, and takes baths and changes his clothes. Evenings, maybe, we'll go to a Christian Science lecture or to the theatres where we'll see actors and actresses perform like people was never knowed to perform in real life.

"It ain't until I've stood a month or so of this and it's past New Year's and I got used to being dressed up in store clothes every day all day long and have see so many sights they don't no longer mean nothing to me, that I rebel ag'in the life we're leading and feel called upon to talk to Bobtail real serious and earnest.

"Hell, I tell him. It's a great state of affairs when men like us that once knowed how to stir up our own adventures have come to the point where they got to take their excitement from looking at new tall buildings and watching steam shovels work and reading in the newspapers about divorce cases and murders and the love affairs of a lady preacher.

"From being a man, I tell him, he's got to the point where all he thinks about is his insides and the things he owns, and danged if he ain't gitting me to feeling the same way too. Even if it bothers him to git dust on his car and miss a bath and not water his lawn regular, he owes it to hisself to keep his hand in here and there and be able to take some pride in his own deeds, instead of them of architects and street contractors. Lurking around amongst the department stores and bungalows and delicatessens and churches and moving pitcher palaces, there must still be some chance in these parts for fellers that's proved theirselves equal, in times past, to holding their own in life's rough and tumble. My camping pardner, Lon, I suggests, is likely a man that's ready for most anything, after having spent several weeks with his daughter. Why don't we look him up which I been intending to do all along, and see if there ain't some man size' entertainment the three of us can stir up together.

"Bobtail seems enthusiastic about it for a few minutes, and something like his old fire comes back. Danged if I ain't right, he says, and danged if he ain't ready for anything. He sneaks a bottle of that pale colored liquor out of the sideboard, and we git in the car and start for the address Lon gave me. It's over in another part of town, but the streets look jest like all the others—all neat and clean and nice tidy houses.

"We find Lon out on the front porch with his feet set rebellious on the railing, trying to kill the bugs on a fancy rosebush by shooting tobacco juice at them. There's a desperate look in his eye, and from the stains on the porch rail he must have spent most of the time since I last saw him at the same occupation.

"His eyes light up when I tell him we're setting out for an old time taste of excitement and adventure, with the sky the limit. But the spark dies out right away. We won't find it, he says. He's tried already, he says, and the only real excitement he's had all the time he's been here was to fall down with a tray of dishes in a cafeteria. He didn't even git no kick, he says, out of the Idaho State picnic. There wasn't no broncho busting and there wasn't no faro layout nor no liquor. All the people done was eat like horses and then set around the rest of the afternoon and talk about how hard they used to work before they retired and come here, and how they earned the right to this pleasant, easy life, and then started complaining about the things that ailed them.

"Still and all, Lon's willing to go in the house and git his hat and come along with us. We sneak around into his daughter's garage and all have a pull out of Bobtail's bottle. Taken in its natural state like that, without no cracked ice or fruit juices, it's got some body to it and we all feel better after tilting two three good swallers into our systems. The horizon seems to be gitting wider and the distances mysterious, the way they used to back in Montana when Bobtail and me was young fellers in off the range with three months' pay in our pockets.

"I'M FEELING real good when we come out of that garage and start for the street. But that shiny seedan with them fancy curtains at the windows and a bunch of cloth flowers in the vase inside and a green vizor over the windshield like barbers wear—only bigger to keep the sun out of your eyes—and them tidy houses and lawns and smooth concrete streets don't let it last long.

"Well, we started cruising around looking for something exciting to do, and the only thing that happens all morning is that we git cussed out by a woman that scraped our fender and that we took to be a lady until she opened her mouth. Noon finds us waiting on ourselves in a cafeteria, with the liquor gone and all three of us sober.

"After dinner we start out ag'in hopeful. We go by a vacant lot where there's been a big tabernacle built and some revivalist is holding services. There's shouting and singing coming out of the building. It sounds livelier than anything we've saw so far, so we git down and go in.

"The revivalist is preaching about sin, and to hear him tell it the town is full of it. We're living, he claims, in a dissolute age, with wine, women and song rampant, and the Devil laying in wait jest around the corner. It cheers us up considerable to hear him, and we put a dollar in the collection plate when it's passed, and start out ag'in more hopeful.

"Lon and me are for having Bobtail hunt up the bootlegger where he gits that liquor of his. But Bobtail don't know his address, because the feller just comes to the house regular like the milkman and takes orders, and then comes back and delivers.

"The preacher's reference to the parts of town where the pleasures of the flesh he's referred to are the most rampant, have been kind of vague and general and we don't have no luck locating them. We remember he's talked considerable about the actors and actresses being dissolute and has hinted at high jinks around the movie lots. So after a while we circulate out in that direction. There ain't nothing exciting that we can see. Maybe something is going on inside the fences, but we don't git no further than a little house by a gate with a sour faced feller in it keeping folks from going inside unless they got some business.

"We're all set to come away when Lon happens to read something that's wrote in chalk on a big blackboard they got there by the gate. It's a list of what they call extras, that they're needing for some of their pitchers, and down among them there's a note that they're going to want a lot of fellers that are able to ride horseback. They 'specially want about a dozen middle aged or oldish fellers that are willing to grow whiskers.

"Well, all three of us can ride horseback. That is, we once could ride a horse or a steer or any critter that was haired over. We're middle aged to oldish all right, and can raise whiskers if we try. Fact, Lon's already got the beginning of his, it being near the end of the week and him one of these fellers that objects to shaving any other time except Sunday. Before we know it, we've got by that feller in the little house and are marching inside the gate to a second feller, that looks us over and sizes us up like this was a county fair and we was fat beef stock. Seems like he's satisfied with us, though his face don't show it, and we're engaged to come back in three weeks for our first taste of being movie actors.

"We're to leave town, the feller says. The pitcher's to be took out in the country where there's plenty of natural scenery. We're to bring our nightshirts, if any, and a change of socks, and sleep in tents while practising and gitting the pitcher shot.

"On the way home, Bobtail starts worrying about being able to git away for that long. He ain't stayed out so much as a night for so long he's all out of the habit. The widow, he says, is scared to stay alone. Every day you read about the burglaries in the papers. I can remember the time when the widow run a drunk halfbreed that was waving a knife right off her place with no other weapon but a butter paddle. Lon and me are lucky, Bobtail says. Me, not having any women folks to git weak and timid on me, and Lon's daughter having a husband to look after her.

"Bobtail shakes his head real doleful all the way home, and it's plain to be seen he's kind of expecting and hoping the widow'll set her foot down hard on the idea of his going out in the hills and riding a horse around amongst the sagebrush.

"But he's misjudged the widow. She's been reading in the movie magazines about this pitcher that's going to be took, and already knows something about it. It ain't jest a Western cowboy pitcher like we thought, on account of their wanting horsemen. It's to be a big A-rab pitcher of the desert and strong men with Oriental ideas about their women, and fighting and love making and races across the hot desert sands, and it's to be called 'The Passion Flower'. The star in it is to be this Desmond Carruthers that the widow's so crazy about, and the heroine is Vivienne LaMonte.

"The widow's all excited and proud about our having been took for the pitcher, and gitting a chance to associate with a big star. Bobtail's lost what little enthusiasm he had when he hears about this Carruthers, and he's more than ever for backing out on the job. But the widow won't listen to it. She's already planning on coming out to visit us while the pitcher is being took.

"We jest sit around the next three weeks killing time and reading up in the moving pitcher magazines about our fellow actors. Lon'll come over 'most every day to git away from his daughter, who ain't sympathetic about his project like the widow, and objects steady to his starting out to grow a face crop of hair at his time of life.

"WE ALREADY know from the widow that this Desmond Carruthers is a big, handsome, manly man that's jest full of cool heroism and vy-rility and personal charm. It's claimed that in this new pitcher he'll rise to heights of nobility even greater than any he's ever reached before. A lot of the stuff we read is about the heroine. From her pitchers she's a humdinger, and the write-ups all claim she's jest a sweet, old fashioned girl that's been left simple and unspoiled by the popularity that has made her one of the foremost stars. She's got a innocent, happy outlook on life and her one big ambition is to become even bigger and better for her public, and to make a comfortable home for her dear old mother and a pure bred Roosian wolfhound that's always with her in her photographs.

"Here and there we find some reference to her first and second husbands, neither one of who is now current. It seems like quite a few helpmates for a simple, old fashioned girl that's only going on twenty-four. But Bobtail argues that having a disposition like it says, and being loving and trusting, they probably took advantage of her and she got rid of them and went back to being simple and old fashioned as soon as she was able. The widow don't put much faith in what the magazines say about the girl, but she believes every word about Desmond Carruthers.

"Well, the morning comes around when we're to report at the studio. The widow takes us all down and leaves us at the gate with much regret. Inside, they're gathering people up and loading them in busses. They're a funny looking crowd of folks—about fifty other assorted fellers and a bunch of girls and women. The big actors ain't to be seen. They don't herd with the common run of folks, but will come out later when the pitcher's ready to be took.

"It ain't until we're settled in the busses that I git a chance to size up the others. Lon and Bobtail are sharing a seat together, and alongside me's a big young feller that must scale six foot two when he's standing up, and is wearing elegant clothes, and has got blue eyes set wide apart and one of these big sober honest faces.

"Him and me set right to work gitting acquainted. His name's Horace Ebbets, and he was born in the Pendleton country where his father was a big old time cattleman. The old man give up cattle when Horace was a boy, and moved up into the Palouse country where he got to be a big wheat rancher. Horace jest stayed around home and helped his father, who was old fashioned and didn't believe in too much education.

"The old man kept Horace in close and worked him hard, and Horace ain't never been around much or been able to do nothing but help run the big ranch. Here a year back the old man died and Horace, that ain't never had no spending money but what little the old man dealt out to him, finds himself the owner of land worth two, three hunderd thousand dollars with a good steady income that makes him feel like a millionaire. He come down to California for the winter, and while he was loafing around killing time he come on this chance to see something of the inside of moving pitchers, and took it.

"That's about all I git out of him at the first setting. I make Horace acquainted with Lon and Bobtail, and the four of us team up together. Horace fits in fine, being one of these slow thinking, honest, good hearted fellers that's short on humor but steady as a team of workhorses.

"The place where they dump us out after a long ride is a big sandy desert. The sand's all bare and blowed into hills like big snow drifts. There's a bunch of palm trees stuck up in one place to look like an oasis, and off in another place a big structure that looks like the front side of a fort. A feller in Army pants and riding boots starts yelling at us through a megaphone the minute we set foot on the ground. We could have heard him if he'd whispered, but he's so used to talking into the thing out of the corner of his mouth I guess he'd have been dumb without it.

"He's telling us what's expected of us. Part of us including me and Lon and Horace and Bobtail are supposed to be A-rabs. The others is French soldiers. The horses are picketed to a long cable stretched between posts. There's also some donkeys and a half dozen camels. Bobtail, who's been worrying about what kind of beds we're going to have to sleep on, cheers up right away when he sees the horses. Seems like he's a new man when he gits among them cayuses and works down along the line, looking over their points and coming across some old, well knowed brands. The four of us pick us out the best of the lot and start looking around for saddles. But at this point, the feller with the megaphone takes a hand.

"He looks us over sharper even than the feller that hired us, and right away he picks Lon out and sizes him up alongside one of the camels. He seems real happy to see how Lon and the brute kind of go together, and picks him out on the spot to ride that ship of the desert. Lon puts up a big holler. He ain't never rode one of the critters, he says, and they smell bad and are apt to bring back his hay fever, and anyway he's got a big general objection to them, having once been a bartender. But the feller with the megaphone gits around him by making him think anybody can ride a horse, but it takes a extra good man to ride a camel.

"ALL THIS time Bobtail's been fidgeting around a big, high withered roan with a wall eye and a lot of spirit. I can see the little feller's shucked off fifteen years and is jest itching to fork that cayuse and rake him a little and see what he's got in him. But the feller with the megaphone's got other ideas. He sizes up Bobtail 'most as close as he done Lon, and danged if he don't pick him out to be a old patriarch, a-riding one of the donkeys. Horace, he gits the roan and I draw a hammer headed sorrel.

"Maybe you seen this picture—'The Passion Flower'—and know the story. It's high toned, and full of action and elegant sentiments. It starts with a tribe of A-rabs ruled by a big mysterious chief that's come from God knows where, and climbed up to be boss by force of character. During its spare time this tribe is fighting the French.

"One day the chief kidnaps a high class white girl that's been visiting friends in one of the French forts, and got restless and wandered out in the desert to pick passion flowers that she'd heard growed in a certain oasis. She finds the flowers all right, but before she can pick them the big chief comes along and jerks her up on the horse behind him, and carries her off to another oasis where the tribe is camped.

"He's going to treat her jest like any other good looking woman he found out loose in the desert hunting passion flowers. Down underneath it's kind of hinted she hopes he will. But when he gits her back to his tent among the oriental rugs and soft pillows, this girlish innocence and purity she's noted for makes him hold up. It stirs up a lot of forgotten things in him that makes him think bitterly of his present life, and look back to the time when he was worthy to face so much maidenly purity.

"Even though he is passing for an

A-rab chief he's really a white man down underneath his A-rab clothes and his sunburn—a French soldier of high birth that deserted from the army and turned ag'in his country. Personally, it seems to me that a purty woman that's been hunting passion flowers is 'most as safe in the hands of an A-rab as she is in the hands of a Frenchman, or any other kind of ex-soldier. But it ain't that way in the film.

"There's what starts out to be a big love scene but ends up by his throwing the girl back down on the couch in a panting heap, and rushing out of the tent to gallop all night over the desert biting his nails and clenching his fists and otherwise going through the agonies of a man that's trying to git back his lost soul.

"This experience with the girl raises the devil with the chief. It's been previously planned how the tribe is going to sweep down on the fort next morning and wipe the French off the map with a surprise attack. But overnight the chief finds out he is a Frenchman and a white man and a gentleman after all. There's a scene back at his tent jest before dawn, with all the hot lust he's felt the night before turned into a great, self-sacrificing love. He tells the girl he's white as she is, and feels called upon to expose his chest and thump it for her to see.

"This sets her panting ag'in, but she holds herself in. Something noble is growing up in her too. The French garrison must be saved. The only thing to do is for her to take his swiftest A-rab stallion and ride back to the fort with news of the attack while he delays the tribesmen as much as he can. There's strong feelings here. She's riding out of his life jest when their great love has dawned, going back to her kind while he must remain the self-sacrificing renegade.

"It looks tough for the two of them right here. And the breaks keep going ag'in them right up almost to the end of the pitcher. The heroine's horse falls and busts a leg. She keeps going on foot. The attacking party with the big chief at the head comes up in sight of her when she's 'most to the fort. The chief thinks all is lost and spurs ahead. He grabs up the girl and heads for the fort, shooting back at the rest of the A-rabs that's in pursuit. Their horse is shot and they stand off the others from behind it until the French can come out from the fort and take a hand and run the A-rabs off. There's a happy ending with the hero gitting the girl and a pardon from the French for being so noble.

"That's the story. Part of it's been already took in the studio back in Hollywood, and the rest is what we start rehearsing. First off we're a caravan going peaceful over the desert. Then we're lounging around the oasis, and after that we stage a big fight with shooting and wild riding. We go over and over it and git all messed up, and what with the hot sun and sand and our not having rode much lately, Horace and me're ready to call it a day when it gits six o'clock and the feller with the megaphone is through yelling at us.

"AFTER supper me and Horace go for a little walk to take the stiffness out of our legs. It's gitting dark and the desert's cool and quiet, and after awhile Horace opens up like a boy that's in trouble and tells me some more about himself.

"Seems like he ain't never had much to do with girls nor none of the other pleasures of life. He's worked hard like he was a hired hand, and ain't had no chance to circulate around and git acquainted with people. About his only recreation was slipping into the moving pitchers now and ag'in when he was in town on business for his old man.

"During one of these debauches he's seen this heroine, this Vivienne LaMonte, in a film called 'All For Love,' and has right away fell in love with her. He's gone plumb nutty and dreamed about her nights and read everything he could find out about her.

"Naturally his feelings toward the lady are kind of general and hazy, like a man feels towards the queens he'll read about in history. But when the old man dies, Horace suddenly realizes he's free, and got property and a steady income, and all the bars that held him in are down. He's like a boy let out of school.

"There ain't nothing to hold him back now from following up his great love and coming down to Hollywood and gitting himself swell clothes and moving in high toned circles and actually meeting the lady of his dreams.

"So after the fall work's finished he's left things in charge of a foreman, and drawed himself plenty of money, and come to Hollywood and put up at one of the swell hotels. It's a couple of weeks before he's outfitted and barbered and cultured up enough to be willing to make a start at meeting the object of his adoration. First off he writes her letters that he makes up with the help of a book he's bought on the subject. But they don't git no answer. He supposes she's bothered to death with fellers writing her letters, and ain't got no way to tell which ones is sincere and which is rascals.

"He takes to hanging around her house hoping that something will happen that he can take advantage of and accidentally meet her. But he only gits glimpses of her passing in or out of her car.

"He has other ideas like gitting a job as her chauffeur and suddenly revealing himself as her admirer after she has learned to trust him. He even considers the plan of gitting a job cutting the grass on her lawn or being her butler, but this don't come to nothing. Finally he gits to hanging around the studio, and he sees this notice of horsemen wanted for the big pitcher she's going to star in. That's his big chance to meet her out of doors in the environment he's used to, and so here he is.

"Well, we spend the next day jest doing some more practising. Vivienne LaMonte nor Desmond Carruthers nor none of the real actors are in sight. We go over the same riding and fighting and shooting, with the feller yelling at us through the megaphone and all us riders that was once horsemen, but have got kind of out of condition, gitting stiffer and crosser and more saddle-galled. Bobtail ain't taking no physical punishment, being a patriarch and not supposed to move around much. But he's suffering plenty in the spirit, having to sit around on that long eared steed of his and watch the rest of us ride and thinking how he's going to look in the eyes of the widow, straddling that donkey while her big hero, Desmond Carruthers, cavorts around on the pure bred Arabian horse they got for him.

"I'm having frequent recourse to my bottle of Spavin Cure, and even Horace, who's been in better condition, is a little stiff in the joints from staying on that big roan. Lon, he's worse off than any. That camel of his has got a gait that ain't like no other living critter, and it's hard to git used to. Lon don't have no trouble staying on. The feller that owns and looks after the camels has told him how to avoid the shocks by keeping his body loose and letting it sway with the motion of the critter. Lon leaves them lanky, two, three yards of his so loose his head looks like a corn tassel in a high wind. It eases up the strain on his backbone but it makes him seasick, and he's gitting gaunted up from not being able to hold no food on his stomach.

"It's while we been doing all the practising that we first notice one of the girls that's among the extras. They got about a dozen women supposed to be setting around the oasis. Most of them is purty silly acting and stage struck. They're always gitting theirselves into attitudes, and doing things to attract the attention of the feller with the megaphone. But this girl, she's sensible and good looking and quiet. She's purtier in her own right than the other ones that's got theirselves all tricked up, some with wavy tresses that hang down on their shoulders, and some with their hair made into little spit curls on their foreheads, and some with sweet winning expressions and others with haughty dignity.

"Among all these posing females, this girl stands out like a sore thumb and the second evening, me and Bobtail and Lon, we git acquainted with her. We're setting in front of our tent when she passes by and hears us talking about Lon's boyhood home—the Snake River country. She stops and smiles at us like we was old friends and asks if she can sit down and visit with us.

"SEEMS like she's from up in that part of the country herself and she's lonesome to hear about it. Her father's been a storekeeper in one of the small Idaho towns. His health failed after her mother died and she's brought him down to California. I gather they ain't any too well off, and between times of taking care of her old man she looks up anything she can to earn a little extra money.

"She ain't never had nothing to do with the moving pitchers before, and ain't got no silly notions about them. She's jest come out here to earn a few extra dollars. She's used to ranch life and has been around outdoor men a lot and knows how to git along with them. We have a real pleasant visit. I'm wishing Horace might be with us too. It'd do him good to see and talk to a real girl. But he's in the eating tent sweating over a letter he's hoping to be able to slip to Vivienne LaMonte when she shows up the next day, and he don't git back in time to be interduced to this girl whose name is plain Smith, Alice Smith, both of them spelled with an 'i' the way they was intended. She's the kind of a girl that'd have kept me from being a bachelor if I'd have met her at Horace's age. But he's so full of this Vivienne LaMonte that even if he had met Alice she might jest as well have been bowlegged like Bobtail, or lean and hungry and bent in the middle like good old Lon, or haired over with brindle whiskers like yours truly.

"Well, the actors come the next morning. Horace, he's found out when they're going to git here and he's right in the middle of the crowd of stage struck girls that's giggling and watching Desmond Carruthers git down out of his car. Vivienne's in the seat beside him, laying back languid ag'in the cushions, paying no attention to common folks. She acts more like she was Cleopatra than the simple, sweet little girl that's making her life work the care of her dear old mother and the Roosian wolfhound. But Horace is so excited jest seeing her close that way that I guess he don't pay no notice.

"I don't git more than a glimpse of her because I been busy gitting into my A-rab costume. But I hear her a plenty five, ten minutes later. Her and Desmond Carruthers have gone into the tent of the feller with the megaphone, and the choicest line of cuss words I ever listen to in my life is coming out through the canvas. Vivienne's damning the director's eyes and everything else she can think of because he's drug her out here today when she had an appointment with her hairdresser. From the conversation it seems like her and Carruthers are engaged, and when he puts in an oar she cuts loose and damns him too.

"I run to git Lon and Bobtail, not being willing for them to miss a elegant treat the like of which I ain't never heard even in the palmiest days of the roundup. I'm going to git Horace too, and git some of them fool worshiping ideas of his out of his head. But he's killed so much time standing there waiting for Vivienne and watching her git down out of the car that he ain't dressed yet, and he's all in a sweat gitting into his baggy A-rab pants and smearing on his sunburned complexion.

"Before we're ready to start with the pitcher there's a complication comes up. Vivienne, it seems, won't go near a horse, let alone ride one. They've brought out a girl that looks some like her to do the riding. But this girl's been took sick on the way out, and now she ain't able to hold up her head.

"The director feller, he's had his eye on this friend of ours, this Alice Smith I mentioned. She can ride like she was born in a saddle, and though she don't look none like Vivienne in the face, she's got the same figger and the same color hair. The director fixes it up with her to do Vivienne's riding. Vivienne's ag'in it. She claims no common extra girl that don't know nothing about how her temperament reacts to emotions can double for her, even in the riding and kidnaping parts where there ain't no need to show her face. There's the beginning of another cussing match, and Vivienne'd had her way and gone back to town if Carruthers, who's been eying Alice, hadn't sided with the director and helped to smooth her down. Carruthers, he's been taking riding lessons in a park back in Hollywood and don't need no double, the kind of clothes he wears in the pitcher being long and flowing and hiding the half foot of blue sky and white desert you'd ordinarily see between him and the saddle every time the horse sets down a couple of feet.

"Well, after a lot of false starts we git under way. Horace, he's missed all the fussing. When he comes out of the dressing tent everything's been fixed up and he don't know nothing about the arrangement of somebody else doing Vivienne's riding. We go at the thing hindside foremost and first we stage the stand-off in front of the fort. Everything goes along purty well except for Lon gitting seasick on his camel right in front of the camera and that part having to be took over again. Horace and me 'most rides ourselves to death and when we git through that part, Horace's lost his turban and got his head all full of sand and I got a hole in my pants where a French soldier's shot me with a blank. Bobtail, he's jest been patriarching around on his donkey amongst the women and girls and ain't had no hand in the fight.

"WE BEEN expecting the widow to show up almost any time like she threatened, but we worry along through two, three other parts and she ain't nowhere to be seen.

"We git around finally to the scene where the chief first captures the heroine. Lon and me, we're riding guard at the far side of the oasis. Horace, he's one of the A-rabs lounging in front of the tent. Bobtail, he's setting his donkey in among the girls and women. The big hero, Carruthers, and Alice Smith, are standing alone a little ways off alongside his horse waiting for the camera to come and take the pitcher of the abduction. Poor old Horace is all eyes for Alice Smith, who he thinks at that distance is Vivienne LaMonte. I can see him fumbling with the letter he's got wrote to give her.

"There's a hitch somewheres. While we're waiting I see the noble feller, Carruthers, commencing to git fresh with Alice. He's so used to women falling for him I guess he thinks Alice has fell too. He's kind of pawing at her in a sneaking way. She's disgusted and pulling away from him. He keeps it up and Lon and me, we're gitting restless when we see Alice slap him. He goes plumb mad at that and grabs her. Lon lets out a whoop and larrups his camel. I throw the spurs into my cayuse. But while we're gitting under way we hear a roar like a bull and see Horace charging. Right behind him, lickety split, with the sand flying, comes Bobtail on his little donkey. He's been a-smoldering and a-smoldering there all day and has finally took fire.

"Carruthers hears all the ruckus coming and lets go Alice. He swings round with the scared, nasty look of the natural born coward on his face. He's got a revolver but there ain't nothing but blanks in it. But he's wearing a long curved scabbard at his belt that holds a real sword. He takes one look at all us A-rabs thundering down on him and pulls out the sword and swings it awkward up into the air like a boy that's playing soldier with a stick. Horace don't even appear to see it. He jest charges right under it and before Carruthers can do more'n take a nick out of his ear, Horace lays the big chief out flatter'n if he'd been kicked by a mule.

"There wouldn't have been nothing for Lon and Bobtail and me to do 'cept lift up the fallen hero if it hadn't been for Vivienne LaMonte. She's seen the fracas from back in the director's tent and here she comes like a spitting wildcat to take a hand. Horace is standing there batting his eyes at Alice and trying to figger out how she comes to look so different, when the sweet simple Vivienne who he's thought he was rescuing, sails into him from behind. She fetches him a claw down the side of the face that leaves four red tracks, in the meantime blistering him with the worst language I ever heard. There's gitting to be a lot of confusion as folks have started running up. Over my shoulder I see the man with the megaphone coming and behind him a shiny seedan with its front wheels wobbling in the sand.

"Carruthers has got to his feet by now. With so many folks around him I guess he feels like he ought to be brave. Vivienne's keeping Horace good and busy, so Carruthers picks on the smallest feller he can find, which is Bobtail. Ag'in he makes a big mistake. Bobtail lets out a old joyous whoop I ain't heard in fifteen years and jest swarms all over the big hero. He's got the noble feller down and is kind of marching back and forth on him when Vivienne quits Horace sudden and takes a hand. She makes a pass with them claws of hers, and Bobtail's bald head suffers. She's starting a second pass when a capable figger steps out of the crowd. It's the widow, that's got there too late for the pitcher, but in time to see her husband clean up on her moving pitcher idol, and now being raked by Vivienne LaMonte. Before we know what's up, the widow's grabbed the heroine and is setting down strong and determined in the sand, with Vivienne bent handy and receptive across her lap.

"Well, that simple sweet old fashioned spanking the widow delivers busts up the fracas. Desmond and Vivienne are bruised and temperamental wrecks. The director, who don't seem as much put out as you might expect, ships them off home in their automobile. Being an ingenious feller, he makes up Horace as Carruthers and takes the big kidnaping scene, with him snatching up Alice and galloping off on his horse with her behind him. They look real elegant together.

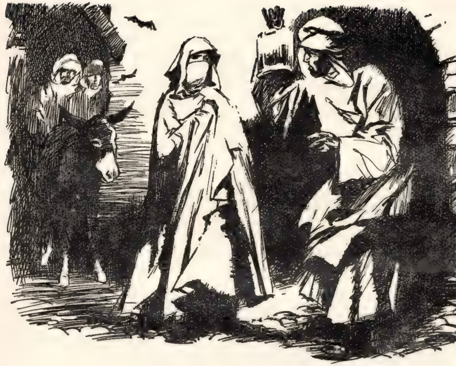
"Lon and me, we ride back lonesome in the bus that night. The widow and Bobtail, they take Horace and Alice Smith. They make out there's plenty of room for us too. But what with Horace all excited to find out Alice squares up jest about perfect with the pitcher of Vivienne LaMonte he's had in his mind, and the widow commencing to look ag'in at Bobtail with the admiration she used to feel when he was performing back on the range, it ain't the proper atmosphere for a couple of old coyotes that's put the thoughts of domestic joys behind them and are jest kind of killing time until they can git back to open country where they belong."

The old homesteader paused to sigh profoundly.

"Lon and me," he resumed, "had a nice time camping together on our way home soon as it come spring. He wasn't overly choice as a bedfellow, as I already explained. But he liked to visit. We had Horace and Alice's wedding to talk over, and Bobtail's smashing up the shiny seedan ag'in a telephone post, and fighting a policeman, and busting up a Christian Science meeting, and gitting throwed out of the first performance of 'The Passion Flower' for horse laughing at all the noble parts, and finally gitting so free spirited Lon and me didn't no longer dast go out with him, and the widow deciding they'd better move up on a wheat ranch alongside Horace and Alice in the Palouse."

He sighed again, and tilting forward in his chair, fumbled for fine-cut.

"Largely, as I said in the beginning," he said, "a wasted winter. Or at any rate, almost wasted."



A Story of Morocco by GEORGE E. HOLT

AL LATEEF *the* CLEVER ONE

AL LATEEF, the Clever One, chanting "*La illaha illa Allah,*" walked with heavy feet and bowed head behind the board upon which lay his father, his heart gashed open.

"*La illaha illa allah,*" chanted the mourners ahead of the bier. "*La illaha illa allah,*" chanted those behind, like a prolonged echo.

"There is no God but Allah," they proclaimed to the dead and to the living. The living answered likewise; the dead was silent with secret wisdom.

Upon the rough wooden bier, carried on the robed shoulders of four men, the father of Sid Hassan Sanhajji, the Clever One, rode to burial as an ancient baron upon his shield. Behind him, last among the mourners, came the son for whom he had let his heart be cut in twain. But though the one heart was painless now, the other throbbed with agony; the fatal knife now twisted its bitter edge in the son's own bosom.

"*La illaha illa allah,*" chanted Al Lateef. There is no God but Allah; and in the name of this only god would he punish his father's murderers. Two must pay the price of that knife thrust in the dark—in the darkness where the elder man had waited to warn his son against the very fate that had come upon himself. The blow struck, they had gone happily away, certain of the identity of their victim, for had not they themselves lured him there? Sooner or later, both must pay.

"*La illaha.*" There was no God but Allah—but that which Allah permitted was sometimes bitter on the soul's lips. To find him lying there—price of his son's safety. *Aiwa*, they should pay for every drop of that brave blood which had flowed gladly that a son might live.

Chanting, he marched on. Detection? Al Lateef was unafraid. No one would look for his face beneath the grime of the charcoal seller shuffling along at the rear of the mourners—as though a hired chanter. He had had time to disguise himself very well indeed. Rheumy eyelids in a carbon smudged face; ashy hair instead of the glossy black; a nose distorted by a wad thrust up one nostril. But there was yet a better reason to be unafraid; all Tangier knew that Al Lateef, the Clever One, had been outwitted at last, had met summary death—and that this was his funeral. And so all Tangier watched it go by, a few with satisfaction, but most with regret for Sidi Hassan Sanhajji, the Clever One.

No more than three people knew that he who rode the wood was indeed Sanhajji, but Sanhajji the father, not the son. And those two who had done the vicious deed rejoiced in their ignorance that Vengeance in a ragged brown robe walked behind the bier, avowing that there was no God but Allah.

Not only rejoiced—watched that very Vengeance stride past before the noses of their horses, as they sat saddle in the great *sok*. Their handiwork, and it was orange water in their nostrils.

Two striking figures, these assassins; elegantly portly figures, swathed in the dignity of cream tinted *k'sa's*, their horses decked with embroidered saddles and head gear. His Excellency, the Khalifa of Tetwan; Kaid Wazzani, aide to the vizier of war. Two notables, from whom the crowded democracy of the marketplace kept respectful distance. Al Lateef observed them briefly from beneath the hood of his wretched *djellaba:* truly those who supposed they strode in broad paths of safety actually walked that narrow bridge which spans the flames of hell. Tomorrow . . . The next day . . . Father Sanhajji's heart would be healed with the balm of vengeance. *La illaha illa la* . . .

The city gate was passed, the burying ground reached, the child returned to its mother, Earth. And then Al Lateef turned from the grave and strode swiftly away towards those events which, in the name of Allah the Just, he had vowed should come to pass.

WEAKNESS against strength; cunning against power; mind against force. For Al Lateef was a hunted man, a price upon his dark head. Not for a crime that he had done but, as he now perceived, for a crime he had not done. When he had risen to power he should have turned upon his foes and slain them, thus securing safety for himself. But he had aided them, let them live and plot and at last overthrow him. Yes, his crime was one of omission: a dead enemy makes three friends. And having overthrown him, deprived him of office, of home, of a safe stone whereon to lay his head, they now hunted him, had hunted him, as one hunts the wild boar in the green mesas back of Tetwan. The bitter thought came to him that had he not committed the crime of omission, the hands that had struck down his father might have been impotent for harm. Too late for that. But not too late to mete out punishment.

Nor was vengeance the only motive which now impelled Al Lateef. True, in comparison, it was infinitely weaker. Yet it added, if that were possible, to the deadly rage which made his heart throb as though he had been running. He must deal out that justice upon which revenge is based, but he must also regain his own —property which had been stolen from him by his father's murderer. And that property was a woman.

Al Lateef's secondary motive must in no wise be confused with that milk-and-water abstraction of the Occident—love. A woman had been stolen from him, but he had no thought, as the West would have, for her personal safety, her own emotions, either of fear or grief or pain: she was only a woman. Nevertheless, she was Al Lateef's property, and although he would not have gone across the street because of an impulse of affection for any female, he would walk through flames to regain that which had been stolen from him. Besides, he had never seen her.

Al Lateef did not fail to perceive that the death of his father had been one of the results of a plot, of which another result had been intended.

Marnia she was called; daughter of old Sid Abdeslam of Tangier, to whom Al Lateef had paid the purchase money just before he had been forced to fly for his life. The bargain had been closed, property purchased. The fact that his flight had prevented the marriage ceremony, whereby she would have been brought to the door of his house in a silken covered box on a donkey, did not invalidate the purchase in the least. Nevertheless, Sid Abdeslam had resold La Marnia to the basha, for his *hareem*. And thereafter supposedly had killed her rightful owner.

Now, Al Lateef knew many things about this entire matter. Included in his knowledge was the fact that La Marnia had not yet journeyed, donkeyback, into the basha's *hareem;* that the night of the present day she was to make the journey. He saw the procession, even as he shuffled along behind the corpse of his father. There would be first, a score of musicians, lantern bearers and friends to lead the march. The musicians would produce a ceaseless shrieking of monotonous sounds upon the *ghaitahs*, which were much like the American clarinet upon which he sometimes played—only much louder and of more limited range. There would be three or four drummers, *tum-tumming* with their fingers upon the skin stretched across the openings of earthen jugs. Perhaps two or three *gimbris*, of gourd or turtle shell, like diminutive banjos with three strings. The lantern bearers would swing backward and forward, in unison with the music, the tin lanterns with colored glass panels, in which burned candles.

The making of lanterns, reflected Al Lateef, accounted for the quantity of Standard Oil used in the country: the five gallon cans were used by the tinsmiths. He wondered what became of the oil. And the guests would chant highly suggestive, or positively indecent, interpretations of the Thousand Nights and a Night.

After them would ride the bride, in a box on the back of a donkey. A box the size of a packing case, with a peaked top, and covered with silken hangings. Not only for decorative effect, but to conceal the bride-to-be within. It would roll, as a ship in a heavy sea, upon the little donkey's back; would be kept from slipping by a man walking on either side. And after the bride would follow more musicians, more lantern bearers, more friends singing or shouting or just walking along for the sake of being there. The procession would pass through the narrow streets, perhaps no more than five or six feet wide in places, like a whirlpool of light and noise. The candles in the lanterns would be extinguished by sudden movement; confusion whenever any other pedestrians or riders were encountered. All alike, processions, whether the marchers chanted before and behind the wood, or before and behind the bridal box . . . The procession of life and death . . .

Funeral procession to the chant of *La Illaha*. Wedding procession to the notes of the blithe *ghaitah*.

There had been the first. Yes, there should still be the second. So resolved Al Lateef grimly, and sought discreet but astonished friends in the marketplace, and later, in more secluded precincts.

AL LATEEF'S vision of a wedding procession came doubly true, for even as La Marnia, in the box upon the donkey's back, set forth with true feminine placidity and submission to the will of Allah, for the house of her lord, the basha, the bats flying over the housetops could have seen another wedding party noisily advancing along a street which ran parallel to that followed by the other. Almost parallel, that is; for the two cañon-like thoroughfares came together in a certain point, blended into one, dark and dismal. Precisely at the same moment the two processions encountered each other, crashed into each other, became inextricably confused. The two donkeys bearing the wedding boxes snorted and jumped as though struck by the devil's horns; the boxes upon their backs rolled dangerously, and new hands supported them. Lights were dropped or knocked out of fingers and darkness engulfed the mêlée.

Lights came on again; the tumult died down; order came out of chaos. The procession destined for the basha's house proceeded on its way; the other turned off very shortly into a side street. Two men, injured in the conflict, were left behind. These two had held upright one of the bridal boxes.

The basha stood in the doorway of his house—or, more precisely, at the outer door of a certain room in his house, where he had decided to receive the latest addition to his *hareem*. He heard the music approach and rubbed his fat hands greasily. The procession entered the grounds with a blast of sound which was an outrage to the ear, swept up to the open door. Two men lifted the wooden box from the donkey's back, set it down upon the ground at the basha's feet, then the entire party passed on, bringing their backs to bear upon the basha's private business, sought entrance to that portion of the house where food and drink were offered to one and all.

"Enter, La Marnia," grunted the basha, stepping back a little.

He was an impressive figure, in his house clothing of crimson velvet, heavily embroidered with silken designs—baggy velvet breeches, stockings of whitest wool, new golden slippers, and three-quarter length coat which was almost a kimono, encircled by a glowing silken belt of many colors.

The curtains of the box bulged, spread, and a white figure lunged forth—passed through the doorway. The basha retreated another step. He swung the door closed with a hasty hand, and reached for the woolen *haik* which was wrapped about the figure which stood before him, covering all except the eyes.

But as he made the motion, the *haik* was thrown aside. The man whom he had killed stood revealed, the menace of eternity in his cold eyes.

The fat hand which the basha extended, as though to disprove the existence of the ghasty vision, trembled with sudden palsy; it drew back, afraid, to stifle the groan upon his parted lip—a groan which bore the name of Al Lateef like the scraping of slipper sole upon gravel.

But as swiftly as it had enwrapped him in its paralyzing ice, the mantle of fear fell at his feet. His sight flashed from the face of Al Lateef to the closed door, back to the knife handle in the belt of Al Lateef. Unreal. Impossible. Al Lateef was dead. Al Lateef had ridden the wood, to the chant of *La Illaha illa Allah.* This very day.

Those of the Faith who die in protecting the Faith—against either false prophets or emissaries of Shaitan, the Evil One—gain Paradise and the smiles of the One Prophet.

"Allah!" rasped the basha. "I have killed Al Lateef once, now I must kill his apparition. Back!" His hand fled to the knife at his silken belt. "Back to El Hotama whence . . ."

But ere the knife was clear of its sheath Al Lateef's hand moved with all the speed which anger can give to human muscles—a speed far greater than fear can generate. His hand seemed for a moment to press against the basha's crimson velveted breast; and then to press him downward—slowly—slowly to the tiled floor.

Al Lateef left the knife in its new sheath, threw the *haik* about himself, and stepped into the wedding box, which was immediately lifted to the donkey's back by two men, and the party then set off, singing, at a swift pace.

And this swift pace took them very shortly to the Bab-el-Fahs, the gate in the city wall which gives on the road to Fez. All gates are closed at sundown, and so was the Bab-el-Fahs now. Guards were on duty to see that it remained closed to those whose business in coming or going could not be satisfactorily explained. Even as Al Lateef, in the bridal box, rode up to the gate, another wedding party descended upon it from another direction.

"Y'Allah!" exclaimed the head guard. "Is all Tangier getting married, then?"

But he was a good soul, and had just taken his own second woman. So he was inclined to be indulgent. At his word his subordinates threw open the gate.

"Go with Allah!" he called, waving the two parties forward.

Thus La Marnia, in one bridal box, passed through the city gate into the security of the Anjera, while Al Lateef, her rightful owner, followed in another.

A RAM *in the* THICKET

By ARTHUR WOODWARD

NO BODY of United States troops ever had so strange a name as did the Mormon battalion which was recruited from the immigrant camps of the Latter Day Saints, for service in California during the Mexican War, 1846–47.

In those days the Mormons were having a turbulent time among their neighbors in Missouri and Illinois. They had appealed to the United States Government for aid, but the Washington politicians had turned a deaf ear to them.

Then came the Mexican War.

The Mormons were already on the move by the time the war started. They were seeking a haven of security in the promised land of the Far West, preferably California.

When the war broke out, the Mormon leaders proffered men to aid in the subjugation of California in return for certain concessions of rights of settlement.

Eventually the offer was accepted, and Captain James Allen, of the Regular Army, went into the Mormon camps scattered all the way from Nauvoo, Illinois, to Council Bluffs on the Missouri, to recruit soldiers.

Somehow the word was spread about that the United States was going to recruit the finest of the Mormon men, and these men were to be sacrificed on the battlefield to cut down the strength of the Saints.

Hence the Mormon battalion of five hundred men that was eventually assembled at Council Bluffs, was looked upon by many of the embittered Mormons as a ram in the thicket, like the sacrifice in the ancient Biblical story.

However, strictly speaking, the story was not true, and Brigham Young and the other Mormon leaders looked upon the opportunity to serve the United States, and at the same time establish the vanguard of Mormon immigrants in California, then the Promised Land, as an intervention of Providence.

On July 20th, 1846, the battalion took up the march from Council Bluffs to Fort Leavenworth. To save money, they agreed to turn back to their families the year's clothing allowance advanced them. This amounted to $42 each per year. This fund was used to purchase supplies for the families left behind, who were allowed to take up quarters on Grand Island in the Platte River. Hence the battalion marched off on its two thousand mile hike clad in civilian garments. By the time the detachment reached California many were wearing breech cloths, their shoes were gone, and they wore sandals, or wrapped tattered rags about their feet.

From Leavenworth the outfit marched to Santa Fé via the Cimmeron Route. At Santa Fé, Colonel Philip St. George Cooke assumed command of the battalion. He was a crusty, Regular Army officer who had graduated from West Point in 1827, and had seen service in the Black Hawk War and on the Plains.

It must have galled his Regular Army heart to handle his battalion of undisciplined, undrilled, poorly equipped and ill clad Mormons, the majority of whom were smarting under the hardships endured for their faith in Illinois and Missouri.

Yet both men and colonel came to understand each other before that guelling hike was done.

The men unused to Army discipline were prone to talk back to the colonel.

It is related that one infantryman, ordered to swim a river on a mule to seek a ford for the remainder of the outfit, tested the strength of the current, and finding it too deep and swift, told the colonel he'd see him in hell before he'd drown himself and the mule. Apparently all the rebuke he received was a comment on the colonel's part that the infantryman was a saucy fellow.

The only battle the battalion had enroute was with a herd of wild bulls, which occurred near the San Pedro River in December. There were many wild cattle ranging that portion of the country and a herd of bulls, either from curiosity or natural ferocity, charged the column, goring pack animals and the mounts of the officers. The soldiers opened fire and killed between sixty and eighty of the brutes before the animals would leave them alone.

The country through which the battalion marched was dry, desert land. The wagons often became stuck in the sand and at such times, twenty men tailed on to the ropes to drag the vehicles through the soft places. Their clothes began to fall from them. Sickness attacked them and all the medicine they received was calomel and arsenic.

Yet in spite of the hardships they pressed on. California, the Promised Land, was ahead of them.

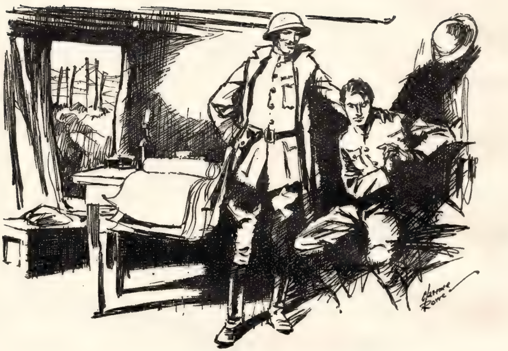
They crossed the Colorado and for five days struggled with the hellish desert wastes of what is now the Imperial Valley. This was the hardest portion of the entire journey. Finally after many had dropped exhausted by the wayside, the command reached the alkaline waters of Carrizo Creek. The worst of the desert trip was over.

Thence by easy stages they marched by way of the San Felipe Valley, hewing a wagon route through solid rock to Warner's ranch, and finally out upon the Pacific by way of the San Luis Rey Valley.

The horrible march was done.

The battalion never fought in any of the engagements of the war. They did garrison duty at San Diego, at Mission San Luis Rey, and at Los Angeles. When the men were mustered out of service, many went to Salt Lake. Others settled in California. Mormon picks and shovels dug the mill race in which James Marshall discovered the lumps of gold that set the world on fire. Incidentally it is the entry in the diary of Henry W. Bigler, a member of the battalion, who was working at Sutter's mill, that gives the true date of the discovery, January 24, 1848.

At the present time it is believed that there is not a single member of the battalion alive, but the memory of a ram in the thicket is very dear to the hearts of the Mormon people, for they were the pioneers.



An unusually poignant story of men in war

A VALOR RUINED MAN

By NORMAN REILLY RAINE

STRETCHED out on his chicken wire bunk with a haversack under his head, Starling, commander of C Company, looked up sharply from his reading as a mud plastered runner from battalion headquarters pushed aside the gas curtain and entered the dugout. He handed Starling a message and stood rigidly at attention, blinking in the candle light after the gloom of the trench. Starling flipped open the envelope, read the message, initialed his acknowledgement, and when the runner had departed, warmed with rum, he read it again—slowly. Then his eyes dropped to a passage in his book; a tattered copy of "Moby Dick," a breath of the free, open sea, that somehow had found its way into the winter trenches.

> That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves, so far within us that it remains intact, though all the outer character seems gone, bleeds with keenest anguish at the undraped spectacle of a valor ruined man. Nor can piety itself, at such a shameful sight, completely stifle her upbraidings against the permitting stars.

Starling's fine eyes puckered; lost themselves in the damp shadows of his cave. After a space he summoned his orderly.

"My compliments to Mr. Blake of the

11th Platoon. Ask him to report here at once."

Blake came, his pinched faced red with cold, stamping and slapping the fresh snow from his boots and trench coat. He straightened in the candle light and essayed a smile, but his heart thumped with trepidation. Starling spoke with calculated, matter of fact cheeriness.

"Battalion has given C Company a job—daybreak patrol to go out this morning. You're next on the slate, Blake, so you'll take it. Jerry's got a machine gun in that ruined red house at C-11-A-2-9. Take eight men and a Lewis gun and shift him. You'll go with them, of course."

The younger man's head was bent. He did not look up, but the blood rushed to his face, then ebbed swiftly, leaving it pasty white. His stomach trembled with dread. He lied, miserably, knowing that Starling knew he was lying, yet powerless to control himself. His shaking fingers plucked at his lips.

"I— Could you—could you detail some one else, sir? I'm not feeling just— A touch of trench fever." Shame overcame him.

"God, Starling, I *can't!* Don't you see? It's not fair to the men."

Men of Starling's caste do not recognize cowardice as such—they acknowledge only degrees of courage. Blake had been a good soldier in the early days at Loos, and after. And he was only twenty-two. Starling's gaze buoyed him up, returned to him a shred of his self respect. He said, casually:

"I'll have to send Johns, then. He likes patrols. Sorry you're not feeling fit, Blake. This is the second time, and I don't want the company talking. Keep your heart in it, lad. Send the sergeant-major down when you go up."

Blake returned to his platoon.

At dawn the patrol under Johns went out, shadowy figures crouching through the mist. An hour later they tumbled back in the fire trench, jubilant, with two casualties and five prisoners, their job well done.

At the end of its tour the battalion was withdrawn and billeted near Poperinghe, and Starling did what he could in his quiet unobtrusive way to buttress Blake's courage. The other's cracking nerves found strength and comfort in his company commander's steadfastness and understanding. His spirit revived in the safety of the present, and Starling began to have hope.

C COMPANY officers messed together in the kitchen of an abandoned farmhouse, and after the drab monotony of the trenches they made their brief holiday a merry one. On the last day out of the line they sat about the dinner table, Starling at the head, lean and bronzed, his deep, kindly eyes reflecting the smile under his thin mustache. Beside him was Blake, his mind at peace in spite of the fact that they were moving up into the trenches the following night. The others were Smith and Patterson, subalterns of the 9th and 10th platoons, Hyde-Bennett, who was a guest from A Company, and No. 12 platoon commander, Johns. Johns was a hearty, red faced bulk of a man, whom a bullet through the vocal cords had endowed with a feminine voice. He was a formidable and ruthless fighter, and was worshiped by his men, who called him Bloody Mary.

Hyde-Bennett, a genial Irishman, spilled whisky into his glass.

"Nice bag of prisoners you fellows got in your raid the other morning," he said. "I was on leave last time in, but I heard about it."

Bloody Mary chuckled.

"It wasn't a raid, Major. It was a blasted patrol. Sorry we didn't get their officer too. Let me tell you. It's rather funny. We went out at daybreak and down the sunken road that runs through our wire to the railway embankment. We hadn't gone a hundred yards when my sergeant heard something. We flopped and lay still, then I crawled up the bank and had a dekko on the other side. There was an enemy patrol, by gad, resting. They were cramming themselves with wurst, or some such muck, before working up to have a peep at us. I sent the Lewis gun up the bank, then the rest of us skulked through the culvert and said good morning. You'd have laughed. They put up a scrap of course, and it was rather sordid for a minute or two. Then their officer—only a kid he was—gave a squawk and legged it off up the road. Left his men flat, by cripes. You're a hell of an officer, thought I, and up the road after him. Well, I caught him."

Starling, who happened to glance at Blake, cut in swiftly.

"Shut your trap, Mary, and pass the whisky."

Johns waived the interruption with a grin.

"I caught him—right in the angle of the red house: his Lüger might have been cheese for all the use he tried to make of it. He backed into the wall, his eyes bugged out with fright, and when he saw me so close he shrieked like a bloody guinea pig. They heard him clear back at the culvert. I let him squeak for a second or two. Then my bullet got him—" Bloody Mary indicated a point under his left jaw—"just there. It blew a hole in his coconut you could—"

Starling's voice rapped out again, unmistakable in its sharp command.

"Shut up, Johns!"

Bloody Mary's eyes opened wide.

"What for?" he demanded, aggrieved. "The little stinker deserved it, didn't he? Letting his men down! God, how I hate a quitter!"

Blake jumped to his feet, his face chalk white. He murmured something and his chair tumbled backward as he made for the door.

"Hullo! What's wrong with old Blake?" Patterson asked.

"He's been under the weather a bit, lately," Starling said. "Never mind him. He'll be all right presently."

"Bit of red flannel next his belly's what he needs," Johns sympathized. "Fine thing, red flannel. I remember one time near Mons . . ."

Starling found Blake in his bunk, weak with nausea.

"It's no good, sir," he moaned. "I'm done in. This trip in the line will finish me."

He buried his face in his hands. Starling sat with him until dawn, but Blake had spoken truth.

THE NEXT day blew in on the wings of an icy gale, snow laden. An hour after a hot midday dinner the battalion moved up. It was dusky, and shrapnel crashed over the *Grand Place* as the long column wound through the pitted streets, past the stark uplifted finger of the Cloth Hall, and out along the Menin Road to the death haunted bog of the Ypres salient. The wind had dropped, but snow fell steadily in large wet flakes. Each plodding infantryman moved under a little blurred canopy of white. The savage thunder of gunfire was softened, the trend of the heavily burdened fighting men cushioned by the fall. The delicate beauty of ruined eaves vignetted in the half light, drew comments in voices husky with false cynicism.

Starling fell out by the side of the *pavé* and watched his beloved troglodytes stumble past, laden with fighting equipment, firewood, water, wire, and odds and ends of comforts and necessities for the winter trenches. He passed an encouraging word or two, then fell in with Blake as his platoon came past.

"How is it going, Don?" he asked casually.

Blake turned a white face in the gloom, shook his head, said nothing.

Starling wrapped his fingers with sane, even pressure around the other's arm, and squeezed.

"Hang on, boy," he said gently. "Take hold of yourself. We go on divisional rest after this trip in, and that means three weeks out of the line."

There was an undercurrent of thrill in his voice.

A hidden battery slammed from a nearby copse, and Blake jumped.

"Steady, man!" Starling warned. "It's our own guns. Keep your teeth into it. Don't let your men down. You'll be all right."

With a last friendly grip the company commander regained his place in the column.

The battalion turned off to the right some distance beyond the ramparts, through a portal of twisted iron and shell riven poplars, and out over the white open fields toward the railway dugouts and Zillebeke Lake. Men strung out into indistinct, heaving files.

"Shell hole on the left . . . wire underfoot . . . wire overhead . . . shell hole."

The litany of guarded warning traveled continuously back along the column. Ghostly flares wavered skyward from the front line at Hill 60 and Santuary Wood and Hooge.

Scattered shells began to drop in the fields behind, and just ahead where the communication trench began. The shelling grew heavier. Casualties occurred in the leading company. An orderly came back, to take cover in the nearby dugouts until the hostile fire slackened. Starling made his way along his company, passing the word. When he came to No. 11 platoon, a question jumped to his lips, only to be stifled. Blake was not with his platoon.

Starling summoned his second in command.

"Take over, and get the company under cover," he directed. "I have a little job to do. I'll be back presently."

He watched them get under way, his mind casting about for a line of action. Panic tugged, but he stamped it down. Then as by inspiration he remembered that a half mile back along their track was an abandoned gun emplacement. Swiftly he calculated the time it would take to reach it. It was not likely that the battalion would move for another half hour, and in any case it could be overtaken in the communication trench. Starling plunged back along the battalion track.

It was quite dark, but the falling snow seemed to shed a soft aura of its own. He had a feeling of intense isolation. The waves of gunfire receded to a sonorous murmur, rimming the silent fields, and old trenches and straggling wire seemed to creep toward him, reaching with ghostly fingers as though in search of the reassuring presence of life.

From somewhere close by a battery of heavy howitzers coughed, and immediately upon the reports came the quick scream and burst of an enemy shell. Starling flung himself down and dirt showered over him. It hardly had settled when another landed, and another—wide, this time, searching for the battery. Starling hurried past the danger spot. Again the rush of displaced air warned him and he dropped.

In the act of getting to his feet he checked himself suddenly, regardless of another warning scream. The concussion knocked him headlong, but he scrambled upright and raced toward a faint glimmer of light that he had seen issuing from beneath the ground. A light in these old gun pits, deserted by all but scavenging rats, meant one thing only.

He fell heavily into the remnant of trench and ran along it, looking for an entry. He found it by tumbling down a short flight of broken steps into a low vaulted cellar with part of the roof blown away.

BLAKE was sitting on an ammunition box in the flickering light of a candle stump, his equipment strewn on the ground about him. His eyes, black pools of utter defeat, stared with grim and awful purpose down the barrel of his service pistol.

Wordlessly Starling hurled himself forward and clapped his left hand over the muzzle. The weapon roared. A thin curtain of acrid smoke arose between them and Starling raised his red, shattered hand. Blake swayed stupidly to his feet, reeled backward, then jerked upright, his face a mask of horror in the candle light.

"Oh, God, what have I done?" he gasped.

Starling set his jaws against the agony and fumbled for his field dressing. He managed words.

"Don't waste time! Get your equipment on and get back to your platoon. It's at the railway dugouts. Move, man!"

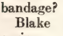
Frantically, inadequately, he pulled at his tunic. Where was that damned bandage?

Blake stumbled toward him, half crying.

"Here—let me do it," he mumbled. Half-way he stopped and his head jerked up.

"Get down, Starling!" he screamed and bore him to the floor.

Dimly, Starling was aware of his weight. The gun pit dissolved in a moil of stone dust and flame.



THE PRESIDENT of the court had read the charge.

"The accused, Captain John Anthony Starling, second battalion, the Royal Murkshires, is charged with misbehavior before the enemy in such manner as to show cowardice, in that he, at Ypres, when his battalion was proceeding for duty in the trenches, did absent himself without leave.

"Two: That he did, subsequent upon the above occurrence, commit upon himself a self-inflicted wound, with intent to evade duty with his battalion."

The room was still. A hard, driving rain, freezing as it fell, assailed the tall windows of the château. The poplars in the courtyard creaked and swayed before the late winter gale. Like surf against iron cliffs, the sullen diapason of gunfire penetrated the room, punctuated by nearer thuddings. The embers in the grate settled with a little rustle, the flame leaping rosily over the heavy furniture. Then it subsided.

Starling wrenched his mind from futilities, from the throbbing flesh under his bandage, from the utter impossibility of defense against this monstrous charge. His eyes rested in turn upon the president of the court, an impassive face, not unkind; the judge-advocate, toying with a ruler, small and dark, conveying despite his atmosphere of Inns of Court, a certain pawky humor; members of the court, all of a type—service worn khaki, incisive lips, clear, health flushed skins, their eyes crowfooted from days and nights of bloody vigil in the trenches. Men of Starling's own kind.

His eyes came to rest on the prosecutor.

Captain Neylan was an oldish man—a combatant officer lately promoted to staff. The war had interrupted his brilliant career as a prosecuting lawyer whose fetish was facts. And when he had piled up sufficient facts of the right sort, the culprit inevitably was imprisoned or hanged. In Neylan's life sentiment did not exist. One was guilty or one was not—facts do not lie. Besides separating him from his career the war had told upon his temper. There was a trace of acid in his thin, infrequent smile; and as he definitely disapproved of a certain laxity permissible in court-martials, favoring the prisoner, he made his tolerance of such well meant blunderings obvious. But this fellow Starling was so patently guilty that even he, the accused, had refused to accept any palliation of the facts, and had resisted every effort of the court to help him. Thus thought the man upon whom Starling's eyes were fixed.

The president's voice dropped like a pebble into the pool of silence.

"Guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, sir."

Even as he said it, Starling realized its uselessness. If only he could meet these men in the easy atmosphere of a regimental mess. How quickly he could make them see. Here, they were emotionally suspended, gripped in the impersonal functioning of a military-legal machine. He had to admit facts. And facts were damning. The prosecutor was elaborating the charge.

"While under fire on the way to the trenches the accused disappeared. He reappeared later at the regimental aid post with a pistol bullet through his left hand. Mark that, gentlemen; a pistol bullet far behind the front line. Prisoner states that it was not self-inflicted. Medical evidence says that the wound was received when the hand was less than one inch from the muzzle of the weapon. We have the evidence of Captain Starling's subalterns and second in command as to his absence. It was reluctantly given, but it is there. One alone did not testify—an unfortunate young officer named Blake who is presumed to have been totally destroyed by a shell while the regiment was moving up. We must not ignore the character evidence by the prisoner's battalion commander—Captain Starling was a competent and courageous officer—even though the witness displayed rather more warmth in rendering his evidence than was justified by later facts. Undoubtedly Captain Starling was a keen soldier; still there are the facts which the prisoner himself does not deny. There were no actual witnesses of the deed, of course, but when circumstantial evidence is so strong guilt must be presumed."

The president leaned forward.

"Have you anything to say, Captain Starling?"

Starling thought deeply. He thought of his battalion, and somewhat of himself. But mostly he thought of Blake, who, not too late, had redeemed himself.

"I can only say, sir, that I did not try to evade duty with my battalion, and I did not shoot myself."

"That is all of the defense you offer?"

"That is all."

The prosecutor sensed the feeling of the court. Starling's manner had told. He shot forward his jaw.

"Why were you absent from your battalion at such a time?"

"I was on a self-imposed mission involving the honor of my battalion."

The prosecutor permitted himself a smile in the direction of the president; but that old connoisseur of men was intent upon the prisoner.

The prosecutor continued—

"What was that mission?"

"I decline to answer."

"I insist."

The president of the court turned from his contemplation of Starling's pale, firm lips.

"Captain Starling has told us that it involves a question of honor," he said, very quietly.

The prosecutor flushed deeply. He returned to the attack.

"Your wound was not self-inflicted?"

"No."

"Was it accidental?"

"Yes."

"Was it done by human agency?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"I decline to say."

"You mean, although knowing your very life may depend upon giving the court that information, you still decline?"

Starling breathed deeply. His knuckles whitened.

"Yes. I decline."

The windows shook in their frames under the distant drumfire. Somewhere a tiny clock tinkled the hour.

"That will do, Captain Neylan," the president said.

SENTENCE for cowardice in wartime is not always death. Much is left to the discretion of the court, and much is taken into account. And a recommendation for mercy invariably brings results. Men have escaped with imprisonment for life, or for shorter terms, and upon occasion, have been set free, to return to the contempt of their fellows.

Starling was cashiered. And being the type of man he was, he immediately enlisted as a private in a line regiment, under his own name. When he returned to France he was a corporal. Among the slag heaps and shell craters of Loos, Sergeant Starling led the remnant of his platoon in bloody assault against a strong point, carried it, and held it against cruel counter attacks for sixteen rather heroic hours. Then promotion's bony finger moved, and John Anthony Starling was again an officer and—quaint thought—a gentleman.

It was shortly after that he once more

met the Prosecutor, who was then Staff Major of a neighboring brigade. There was nothing much to the meeting, really. Neylan was a visitor to Starling's battalion mess and was discussing a point of training with his host when Starling entered the room.

"To my mind," the host was saying, over a glass of whisky and soda, "the Lewis gun has been of great value in teaching the men—hello! Here's Starling. Come here, John. I want you to meet—"

"Yes," interrupted Neylan thoughtfully, gazing through Starling into infinity, "the Lewis gun *is* a useful weapon. So, for that matter, is the service pistol—in the proper hands. You can't get away from that fact."

That is all there was to it, but Starling, being the dull, obstinate fellow he was, applied for and was granted a transfer to a battalion in Neylan's brigade, just in time to take punishment in the epic fight for Passchenstrafel Ridge.

Ponderous howitzers squatted in the mud and roared endlessly. One lone planked road stretched over the morass, bracketed by bursting shells. Shell holes, filled to the brim with stinking water, the only homes the weary fighters knew, were churned by high explosives into a revolting bog that stretched into the dusk as far as eye could see. The ridge, gray and brooding in the rain and the murk, stood, a grim barrier against further progress. At its feet glistened the viscid pools where men had died in thousands in a fruitless morning attack. Enemy wire, cunningly laid under mud and water in a swamp at the foot of the slope, had entangled the infantrymen as they rushed forward to the assault. Small hope for human life under the murderous fire from the crest, and the rolling barrage that immediately dropped on them and smashed them in their helplessness until hope was not, and terror was numb. Those of the attackers who were not shot to bits had drowned in the mud. And now it was night, and brigade headquarters was frantic.

The situation at the front was obscure, enemy shellfire methodically destroying communication lines and roads as fast as they were laid. And until definite information was forthcoming, it was impossible to plan another attack. There were rumors that part of a battalion had got through the swamp and was cut off, fighting desperately on the ridge all day and until long after nightfall. Neylan, who had gone forward to glean what information he could, found himself at two o'clock in the morning in an improvised dugout of the signal corps—a reeking hole in the mud—with a battalion commander of the Aberdeens. The place was being pounded by high explosives. The telephone buzzed madly, and the signaler appeared to be in difficulty.

"What the devil's the matter?" Neylan snapped. "Who's trying to get through?"

The man turned a perplexed face.

"You'd better take it, sir. I can't make out what they're driving at."

Neylan snatched the headpiece, listened, questioned briefly. Then he jumped up, and turned to the infantry commander.

"It's a forward observation post, reporting signals from the face of the ridge with an electric torch, sir. Some lunatic is defending a pillbox he captured this morning against continual attacks. How he got his men through that ghastly swamp God knows. Let's go up and see what its all about."

IN A LULL between bursts they got to the top. There was rain, and icy darkness, but the road gave them direction, and twenty minutes brought them to the front line—a series of shellholes—thinly held by machine gunners, huddled, soaked and shivering, but alert, under inadequate tarpaulins. One of their officers, a young man, who seemed to see like a cat in the dark, pointed into the gloom ahead.

"It was from directly in front and near the top of the ridge, I judge, that the signal came," he told them as they splashed about in the uncertain foothold.

"I think— There it is again!"

Out of the dark and the rain, from the sinister loom of the great ridge, came a series of flashes—pinpoint dashes and dots of light.

"— — — . . . — — — — — —
. . . — — — "

"It's Morse—S.O.S.!" the machine gunner said.

Desperately the little garrison in the beleaguered pillbox sent their message into the night:

> HOLDING PILLBOX NEAR CREST 100 YDS WEST OF ROAD STOP THIRTEEN ALL RANKS STOP AMMUNITION LOW STOP BELIEVE ENEMY STRENGTH LIGHT STOP CAN GUIDE SUPPORTS UNDER COVER DARKNESS THROUGH SWAMP FOR DAWN ATTACK AND SMASH HIS DEFENSE STOP I WILL MEET SUPPORTS CRATER PILLBOX YOUR EDGE OF SWAMP AT FIVE OCLOCK A M STOP GOD SAKE COME STOP

The light flashed once or twice again, evidently the beginning of a signature, but faded to a tiny, indecipherable glow, then died.

"Battery gone," the Aberdeen colonel grunted. "By God, he's a soldier, whoever he is. I heard that nearly a company had got cut off up there. Only thirteen left. What can we do?"

Representing brigade, the decision was Neylan's. He thought rapidly.

"We'll use your battalion, sir," he said. "They're fresh, comparatively, and they are close at hand. It may be only a trick, of course, but we'll have to chance that. If we can get a battalion through that swamp and into a jumping off place on the slope, we should take the ridge an hour after dawn. Lord, what a chance, after that awful mess of yesterday."

"You'll find us ready," the Highlander replied curtly.

"I'll have brigade take steps to follow us up, then. The Aberdeens had better move into position on the left of the plank road, about five hundred yards in rear of Crater Pillbox. Then you and I will move up and meet this fellow and make sure of things before we commit ourselves."

An hour and a half later the kilted Aberdeens, heads bent beneath the pelting downpour, plodded through mud and darkness toward the ridge. No talking, no smoking, was the order, and the hardened, dour fighting men moved in purposeful silence. At their head Neylan and their battalion commander stumbled and splashed, keeping direction with utmost difficulty. Incessant flashes of gunfire played like sheet lightning through the dripping night, and occasionally the column was halted by bursts of heavy but sporadic shellfire ahead. They arrived in position, and company by company, the battalion disposed itself in shellholes.

"If you are ready, sir," Neylan said, "we'll take a couple of runners with us and carry on to Crater Pillbox. This brush track runs right past it. There will be plenty of time to send word back to the battalion if it is to move up."

Two battalion scouts were detailed to accompany them and the little party plowed on. After a time one of the scouts reported a deeper smudge in the blackness—Crater Pillbox. And as they swung slightly to the right and made for it, they saw it suddenly ringed by dull glowing spots of bursting flame.

AN EXPRESS train hurtled overhead and dropped. A shower of mud and débris pelted them. Three more. A full salvo in all. Up to their necks in waterlogged shellholes they took cover. *Crump! Crump! Crump! Crump!* A barrage fell on them. The tortured earth spouted fountains of mud and steel and flame. The din was colossal. Between the bursts Neylan heard the deep groans of some one badly hit. He shouted and his mouth was stopped by flying mud. Desperately he floundered out of his shellhole, reckless of the whistling death all about, and groped blindly through the uproar searching for his companions. They were gone. He alone was left. He staggered blindly forward in the direction of the concrete pillbox, felt the cobbles of a road beneath his floundering boots. With red fury destruction rained from the sky, and by a hundred miracles he escaped it. Where was that cursed pillbox? It was cover. He had to find cover. His whole instinct of self-preservation was bent upon it; yet it could not drive completely from his mind a thought of that desperate leader of a forlorn hope waiting for his support.

Out of the screaming blackness a shell burst showed him a glimpse of a dugout entrance in a pulverized trench. He dived headlong into it and scrambled down the rubbish littered shaft. He knew it for one of the jumping off places of yesterday's attack. Here for a time he would find safe harbor, if a direct hit did not land on the exit and bury him alive. When the storm had cleared he would carry on. Bruised and terribly shaken he scooped the streaming muck from his eyes and face. The earth above and around him trembled and rocked under the impact of huge projectiles. He fumbled for a match to see his watch, and unheeding cut his finger on the broken crystal and twisted metal guard. Well, he could guess the time, and that fellow would have to wait. Nothing could live in the hurricane of steel above. He crouched with thumping heart as part of the wall fell in and the stout roof timbers cracked under the burst of a shell. God, that was close! So was that! Another of those and he'd be done for, beneath thirty feet of earth.

He listened and presently his trained ears told him of the gradual slackening of the barrage. It was just a routine strafe, probably, put down on the chance of catching troops moving up to attack. How narrowly the Aberdeens had missed it. And their colonel . . .

Better get out of this and on with his job. It must be after five. He wondered if the other man had lived through it. In the sound shelter of the pillbox probably he had. Outside was comparatively quiet now. Painfully he clawed his way up over the loose rubbish and more noisome waste of the battered shaft. He had almost gained the top when the concussion of a shell burst in the trench outside blew him back and cracked his skull against a beam. He rolled over and lay motionless half way down the shaft.

THE WATERY light of early morning was pouring through the narrow entrance when Neylan's swimming brain fought its way back to consciousness. He staggered to his feet and crept by agonized degrees toward the open, one thought only dinning through his confused mind—a thought that somehow took him in the pit of the stomach like a blow. It was full day, almost, and what of the attack?

Outside, he straightened with difficulty and looked about him. Behind was a vast churned sea of earth, thousands of shell holes reflecting the steel gray sky. Dazed, incredulous, he saw horses and ammunition limbers, guns and infantrymen, moving forward, a host of them, crawling across the mud. He turned to the ridge. Its crest was a feather of spouting flame, but on the near slope tiny khaki blobs worked upward in battle formation. Stunned, he watched them as they disappeared in small groups into the smoke of the crest, supported by the thundering fire of a thousand guns. And as his haggard unbelieving eyes swept the foreground to the grim bulk of Crater Pillbox, he saw coming toward him over the pitted road five scarecrow figures, moving with the shambling, limp armed gait of utter weariness.

They were caked in blood and slime, and their blackened faces were those of men who had dwelled long in the Valley of the Shadow. At their head marched one, helmetless, taller, and more ragged than the rest, whose uncertain feet were kept to the road only by force of an indomitable will, and whose eyes, red holes in a mask of clay, burned with unquenchable light. Neylan did not need to be told. They were the lone survivors of the ridge, and their leader was Starling.

The former prosecutor sickened with the terrible realization of his own position. His duty had been to keep the rendezvous at all cost. He had failed. While these men and their mates had been fighting and dying like gods, depending on him for rescue, he had been safe under cover. And Starling, whom he had once nailed to the cross with facts, had caught him creeping out of a dugout hours after the danger had passed.

When Starling halted, his men dropped their rifles and sprawled on the muddy road to rest. Their commander stood upright, swaying gently on widely planted legs. Neylan felt his eyes upon him, and the hot color surged to his face and neck. What could he say? How could he plead? Urgently he felt the need of pleading.

But when he raised his head Starling's look was not upon him. It was turned to the battle torn heights beyond. And when their gaze did meet the ragged soldier's eyes were washed clean of all but a transcendental happiness.

"Look, Neylan! God, man, look! We've taken the ridge!"

A gusty sight that came from his innermost heart blew through the cracked lips.

"Its a miracle. Last night that barrage— I knew you couldn't get through it. But my chaps were waiting for me back on the ridge, so I dodged through and by amazing luck stumbled over the colonel of the Aberdeens. He was badly cracked up and thought you were killed, but he told me where his battalion was. I found 'em, and after the fire lifted we moved up. I had blasted a way through the swamp with bombs, and it served. The Aberdeens got into position with the rest of the brigade to back 'em—thanks to your work, I'm told. And after we'd seen the attack get under way— Well, here we are. We've dwindled a bit, but we're all more or less sound. What happened to you, though? Knocked out? I thought you had been. Damned tough, missing the fun, eh? By the way—do you happen to have a tot of rum in your bottle? My fellows here . . ."

The staff man cried out.

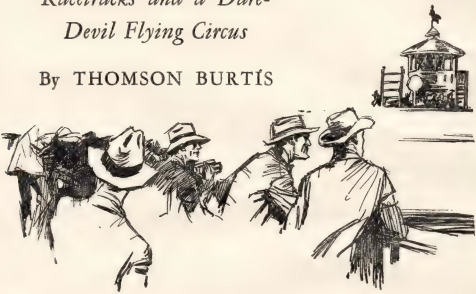
"Good God, you don't understand, man! While you were doing my job and your own too, I was deep in a bloody dugout. Safe. Never mind the reason. You caught me coming out. I've got to face facts, especially after the way I hounded you."

"Facts? To hell with facts," said Starling, wearily. "I asked you if you had any rum."

Beginning HANDICAPS

A Serial of the Kentucky Racetracks and a Dare-Devil Flying Circus

By THOMSON BURTIS



CHAPTER I

THE PRICE OF THE RACKET

THE EVEN roar of the hundred and eighty horsepower motor was broken, briefly, by a sort of cough. George Groody leaned forward tensely. His eyes darted from gage to gage on the instrument board ahead of him. His heart seemed to jump and then it started pumping away like mad.

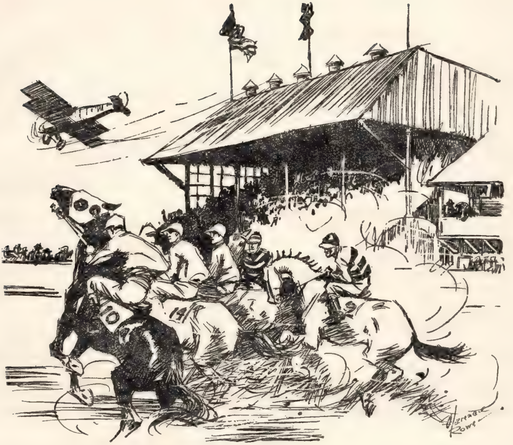
The next instant the even rhythm of the eight cylinders had been resumed. The flyer leaned back. A sense of great relief swept over him.

"Just a bump messing up the carbureter," he told himself. "I might figure that, over a city."

Suddenly he was reviling himself savagely. Why was it that lately it seemed that every hour in the air was an ordeal? His nerves were shot, but he hated to admit it, even to himself. When Cincinnati had come in sight, sprawling hugely in the Ohio sunshine, he had been conscious of a feeling of relaxation. It meant that his objective was very near. The trip had been but an hour and a half. There was no reason for him to feel as if he had been put through a wringer. No reason, that is, except the one for which he hated himself.

As if to escape from his thoughts, he thrust his helmeted head over the side of the cockpit and surveyed the scene below. He was over the Ohio River, now. Covington, like a continuation of Cincinnati, ran southward from the bank of the river. Its fringe touched the Latonia racetrack, all green and white in the sun.

"Sure is a pretty track," Groody



thought to himself. And for the moment, he forgot the burdens, mental and physical, which had been oppressing him.

It was Sunday morning, but the big racing plant showed many signs of life. Dozens of men were walking around the barns, and others were at work on the track, which gleamed whitely. The infield was a checkered oval. Hedges, ponds, tiny hills and valleys—it was like an enlarged edition of a glorious garden.

Groody's reckless face relaxed into a lopsided grin. He looked around and met the eyes of Bob Corrigan, also an ex-Army flyer; what was more, also a former member of the Border Patrol. Groody motioned in the direction of the track. Corrigan nodded, and his rugged, handsome face lighted amazingly as he smiled.

"Maybe if I take a few afternoons at the races, I'll feel better," Groody reflected. "And if Slim Evans is right about that pal of his, maybe we can make enough dough on the ponies to lay off flying awhile."

His lean, hawk-like face became taut again. Unconsciously he had admitted that he did not feel so well. And he hated that feeling. He despised himself for it. Nine months of aerial fighting in France, two years in the Mexican Border Patrol of the Army Air Service, assorted flying of all kinds before and since—and never before had he been jumpy and nervous and sleepless.

"I'm worse than an old woman with indigestion, lumbago and the pip," he jeered at himself. "Snap out of it, boy; snap out of it!"

He found himself gazing around for emergency landing fields. That was right and proper. But why be so wrought up about it?

He peered ahead, toward the low rolling hills which finally melted into the higher slopes of the far famed Kentucky mountains. Somewhere back there was the field he was to use. Tom Service had wired him that it was ten miles or so south of the track . . .

There it was. And the second ship of the Groody Flying Circus was discernible, gleaming in the sunshine. They had the small canvas hangar set up, too.

"I forgot to look for the fair grounds," Groody soliloquized. "I don't suppose they can be far away, though. Sure is better for us to have our field away from 'em. There won't be ten thousand fool onlookers and seven million sappy questions a day."

He throttled the motor to a thousand revolutions, and started a gradual dive. The green and gold ship—a trim little two-seater with a low landing speed and a two mile a minute air speed when the motor was wide open—hummed its way earthward. After years of flying behind bellowing Liberties, the roar of the eight cylinder Wright motor was almost a lullaby. Painted on the lower wings and on the sides of the fuselage, were the words—"Groody Flyers".

When the ship was down to a thousand feet, Groody could see a dozen people and two or three cars on the large, level pasture lot.

"If an airplane landed in the middle of the Sahara Desert, a village would spring up around it overnight," he thought to himself.

HE FELT a hand gripping his arm, and turned around. His eyes followed Corrigan's pointing finger. Three miles or so southward, on a field alongside the muddy Ohio River, were three airplanes, drawn up before a big canvas hangar. Groody nodded. From his side pocket he took a very long and very thin cigar, and inserted it between his teeth, unlighted. Then he paid attention to the business of landing.

It was not complicated, but he felt relieved when it was over. He landed with one bounce, cursed his awkwardness, and taxied up alongside the other plane, an exact duplicate of his own. Tom Service, who, in addition to being manager of the Groody Flyers, was Groody's oldest and closest friend, came out to meet him. There was a letter in his hand, the pilot noticed.

"Well, how's everything?" Groody inquired, as he alighted from the cockpit. "Pretty nice field, eh? These hills make it a little tough, and they'll be tougher if a motor conks, but she's sure smooth."

Service nodded. He was short and very stocky. His round face was adorned by a huge pair of horn rimmed glasses, and his round blue eyes peered through them with an effect of unintelligent innocence. His blond hair was cut in a short brush pompadour which emphasized the fleshy emptiness of his face.

But Tom Service was a very deceiving young man. He looked fat; actually his body was as hard as a rock. He looked stupid and boyish, both of which appearances were very far from the truth.

"Everything s-set," he said mildly. "F-first morning flight tomorrow, and first night exhibition tomorrow n-night. No afternoon flying."

"That helps," Corrigan remarked. "We can take in the races then. Who's the letter for?"

"George. Came by special messenger."

The three men looked curiously at one another as Groody took it. Corrigan, big and wide shouldered, took off his helmet slowly. His shock of coarse black hair sprang upright. He was a shaggy bear of a man, but his square jawed face, lighted by turbulent looking brown eyes, was not only forceful, but most attractive.

"May be another little anonymous love letter, eh?" barked Groody. "Let's see."

A short, slim dark man, with a thin, keen looking face, emerged from the small canvas shelter and Sparrow Cantoni, pilot of the Groody flying circus, hastened to join the group as his chief opened the letter.

There was a moment of silence as Groody's eyes swept over the note. He was standing with slightly bent knees, his lanky body at ease as was customary with him. The unlighted cigar was clamped in one corner of his slightly twisted mouth. His eyes were narrow, and sloped downward from his thin, high bridged nose. Framed in the close fitting helmet, there was something mocking, almost Mephistophelian, about his aquiline countenance.

Little Sparrow Cantoni said not a word. He merely watched Groody's face.

"No luck," Groody said with a relieved grin. "That is, as far as our unknown friend with the poison pen is concerned. Listen:

> "Dear Lieutenant Groody:
>
> "Our mutual friend, Lieutenant Slim Evans, wrote me that he had written to you, and that we must get together. I presume you know that Slim and I own a racehorse between us.
>
> "In addition, something has come up since I last wrote to Slim, which makes it very important that I see you. It will be a pleasure, anyhow—Slim used to talk a lot about you and the old Border Patrol days. Of course you know he's back at McMullen now, and I'm handling our colt, as per usual.
>
> "We aren't quartered at the track. I'm pointing Prince Regent for one race—the Special. I am at the Bluegrass Farm, less than ten miles south of your field. Could you come over this afternoon? If you want to fly, there's space enough inside the practise track here for you to land. This is a big breeding farm—you might enjoy seeing it.
>
> Very truly yours,
>
> —BUDDY REDFIELD.

"Now what could that mean?" queried Groody. "Looks like they needed help some way."

"What the hell could we do to help 'em push a nag in first under the wire?" inquired Sparrow Cantoni.

HE SPOKE in the argot of the slum streets which had been the background of his boyhood. His eyes were black as night in his bony face, and there was a world of sophistication and intelligence glinting in them. His nose was straight and sharp, and he usually talked out of the right corner of his thin mouth. In puttees, boots, and oil grimed shirt, he looked more like a jockey than a flyer. His black hair, highly polished, was parted neatly and slicked back from his olive face. It was easy to visualize him, in different clothes, a sheik of Little Italy.

Groody removed his helmet and lighted his cigar leisurely. He felt better, some way. He realized now that he had been afraid of what that letter might contain. Corrigan and Service had drawn sighs of relief, too. Groody, however, felt almost as if he had secured a reprieve from some menacing fate.

He sat down on the grass. The dozen or so people started to get into their cars, group by group.

"What we could do to help 'em out, I don't know," Groody said, smoothing his close cropped brown hair. "But it must be something."

"Who is this Slim Evans?" Sparrow demanded.

He had joined the Groody Flyers but recently, and was not a full fledged member of the circle formed by Service, Corrigan and Groody. He and Reilly, the mechanic, were still outsiders.

"Slim's still in the Army Air Service, on the Border," Groody informed him. "He's an old friend of Bob's and mine, and Tom here knows him slightly, too. All I know is that when he was stationed up here at Cook Field, he met an old friend of his—this Redfield, an ex-jockey. Together they bought a race horse named Prince Regent. Turned out a great horse, too; seems this Redfield's a wizard as a trainer. In spite of a bunch of tough luck, they won some big races with him. Looks as though this Prince Regent was poison to any owner. They got him cheap for some reason, and then went through hell, as near as I can understand it, to get the colt a fair break in races. Seems as though the world ganged up on 'em. Maybe they're in the same fix now, and I pinch hit for Slim—"

"Hello—looks like we're having company," Corrigan interrupted.

"One of those ships we saw, I imagine," Groody remarked.

A mangy looking Jenny—low powered wartime training ship—had scudded into view, flying low over the rolling hills which hemmed in the field. It landed easily, and taxied up to the circus flyers. A burly figure in breeches, puttees and flannel shirt got out of the cockpit. He was flying without a helmet, and had his goggles pushed up against his mouse colored, spike-like pompadour.

Groody's eyes narrowed until they were mere lines of light below his quizzically arched eyebrows.

"For some reason," he opined, "that bozo looks familiar to me."

The approaching pilot was a giant of a man—as tall as Groody, and almost as big bodied as Corrigan. His shirt was open at the neck, disclosing a bull-like neck which supported a square, somewhat battered face. His nose looked almost like a prizefighter's, and his jaw was square and prominent. Two deep wrinkles between his brows lent an air of sullenness to the ensemble, but it was dissipated by an engaging smile.

"Hello, George Groody," he said, while he was still fifteen feet away. "I'll bet you don't remember me from Adam." He had a high tenor voice which seemed almost ludicrous as it issued from his bulldog face.

GROODY uncoiled and got to his feet. His long legged body seemed as lean and tough as rawhide. He was as lithe and as strong as an uncoiling whip.

"You're familiar to me some way," he admitted. "But I'll be damned if I know from where, or why."

"Well, you put me through final combat training at Issoudun. Then I was with your squadron at the Front for two days, before I got mine. Name's Delaney . . ."

"Oh, sure. Glad to see you again. Meet the bunch."

Delaney's hazel eyes smiled, as did his wide, thick lipped mouth, as he shook hands all around. Tom Service, expert in appraising human nature, set him down as a rough diamond. His clothing and face were grimed with oil and his hands none too clean, but he had a nice smile. He and his ship both had a certain run-down-at-the-heel look.

Delaney unexpectedly got rid of a chew of tobacco which he had hidden in one capacious cheek.

"In case you boys don't know it," he remarked largely, "this boy, Groody, besides getting thirteen Germans officially, was chief combat instructor at Issoudun for a while. Used to go up in a little Nieuport for dog fights with us poor birds, with a cigar just like he's got now in his mouth. In about two seconds he'd be on our tails, and five minutes later, after we'd looped and dived and spun and turned until we were so dizzy we were popping our cakes, we'd look around and there'd be Groody, squatting on our tail like some grinning devil."

"I heard he was pretty good," Service grinned.

As he looked at his friend, his eyes were suddenly very soft behind the shielding glasses.

"I'm not in the business of spreading soft soap," Delaney declared, as he lighted a cigaret, "but it was the general opinion in France that there wasn't any better in the world."

Groody grunted sardonically.

"That's taking in a hell of a lot of territory," he said. "If true, it wouldn't mean anything. All the combat experience I had ought to have shown for something. I noticed I got mine from some German in the end . . ."

"After you'd knocked down two of his friends," Delaney reminded him, and then went on. "What the hell are you doing in the flying circus business, Groody?"

"What are you doing galloping around in a civilian Jenny?" countered Groody.

"I'm with a three ship passenger carrying outfit—Thompson's. Just gypsy flying for a while to pass the time away. We're here for the racing crowds. I saw you billed all over town as booked for the Anniversary Exposition, and I nearly dropped dead. Some classy outfit. Hawks, huh? Great ships. Wish we had 'em."

He gazed at the planes for a moment. The spectators had all left. Reilly, a squat, bowlegged, round faced Irishman, was emerging from the tent, struggling under a load of rope and cable and a pair of parachutes. He threw them on the ground, preparatory to inspection.

"Mechanic, too, huh?" inquired Delaney. "And four flyers and only two ships . . ."

"Tom Service, here, isn't a flyer," Groody informed him. "He's manager. He goes on ahead most of the time. Sparrow Cantoni, we took on recently. He flies, and if necessary, can double for most of the circus stunts."

DELANEY flopped to the ground, and every one but Service followed his example. That chunky gentleman was arrayed as the lilies of the field, from wing collar and bow tie, to polished oxfords. He did not care to risk staining his blue serge.

"You haven't told me yet how you happened to be in this circus business," Delaney reminded Groody. "That is, if I ain't too curious. Wish I'd known it—I'd struck you for a job."

"It's a long story. When I got out of the Army a couple of years ago, Tom Service and I joined up again. He's an old friend. He was a major in the Army Intelligence Service during the war, and then a Federal secret agent after it. When I got out of the Army, he had sort of a private job on, getting the dope on some crooks with a big carnival. He planted me with it as a flying attraction. Then we went down to Texas to see if we couldn't get into oil, and met Bob Corrigan down there. Knew him in the Army, too, and he joined up with us. Well, we made a lot of dough by accident, but we put it all into new acreage that looked, and is still looking, great. But it needed a hell of a lot of capital to develop it, see?

"We came North to get it, and found out that the only money available was at such high interest that we might as well give the skinflints the acreage and let it go at that. Then Tom and I dug up a flying circus job with a big ground circus. Combination of talents. They needed some detective work done and a business stimulator besides, and they paid us money enough to keep the works greased in Texas. I don't mind the wing walking stuff and all that, so we fell for it and got Bob here to come up from Texas to help out.

"After we got through with the show, we couldn't figure any other way to raise enough money. That is, without paying about thirty per cent. interest and that stuff. We'll all be rich out of that tract. We didn't want to sell acreage, either. Wanted to prove it all up, then sell out to a big company, lock, stock and barrel. And this circus racket is worth fifteen hundred a day. So we got a booking here, and if our stuff is satisfactory, we get a string of State fairs and what have you—and can send the required thousand or so a day down South to keep the wheels turning.

"So there you are. A secret service man managing a flying circus, two Army flyers and a civilian pilot working in it, and the whole bunch of us, except Sparrow, damn' near millionaires on paper, if we can hold out. Great racket, eh?"

Those last words were savagely humorous. Sometimes the strain of swinging that proposition in Texas seemed unbearable . . .

"So that's the lay," said Delaney. "Doing pretty well for yourself, I should say. Wish I was in your boots—"

"Say," interrupted Groody harshly. "When I can paint those five foot letters off the side of those ships, and throw that tackle into the river, and burn the last damn' poster that talks about me as though I was some fat headed actor, and stay out of the air forever—"

He stopped abruptly. Corrigan's great brown eyes were probing into his, and Tom Service's had become so keen that they seemed to be stabbing him. Groody threw away his cigar with a wide sweep of his arm.

"Don't mind my raving," he grinned. "I get a lot of fun out of it. I—"

"Lieutenant!"

It was Reilly. He never failed to call Corrigan and Groody by their Army titles.

"Yeah? What?"

Groody glanced up at the mechanic. He felt taut.

The roly-poly Irishman seemed to be controlling himself with a mighty effort. His blue eyes were blazing and he was shaking. His voice choked slightly as he said—

"C'mon an' look at that ladder!"

The circus flyers looked at one another wordlessly. Even Delaney said nothing as they walked the few steps to the spot where the ladder was strung out along the ground. Groody, walking with his customary bent kneed stride, felt that his mind was not registering. He had no thoughts—for the moment—only a numb expectancy.

"Look here, sor!"

The ladder was a narrow one, made of heavy wire cable. Its rungs were also of cable, but covered with one inch pipe.

Reilly knelt down and grasped the length of pipe which covered the bottom rung. He pushed it to the left as far as it would go. Groody leaned over to see better.

Half an inch from the right end of the cross cable, just far enough in to be covered by the shielding pipe when it was in normal position, the heavy cable had been all but filed through. A lesser strain than a man's weight would snap it.

"Why—why, what the hell?" Delaney stammered. "What's the meaning . . ."

"It means," Groody found himself saying slowly, "that those letter writers meant what they said!"

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

FOR a moment no one but Sparrow Cantoni said anything. He was cursing steadily and terribly. Delaney, his mouth open, was looking from face to face, trying to make sure that it was all really happening. Groody, cigar in hand, was looking down at the ladder, but he scarcely saw it. Instead, he saw himself crouched on the upper wing of a ship, leaning against the airstream. That ladder, trailing from another plane, was coming toward him. He saw himself grasp that bottom rung with both hands, and then swing free from his precarious perch.

He shook his head as he felt his heart bound queerly. It was the feeling a person had at the climax of a bad dream. And it was an unaccustomed one for him.

"We might as well have a council of war," he found himself saying.

With one accord the men dropped to the ground. Delaney found his tongue.

"What do you mean—letter writers? Is this stuff an old story? Lord, Groody, you'd have been dead as a doornail . . ."

"Or deader," agreed Groody. "Tom, how's the old secret service working?"

Service removed his glasses and polished them absently. His round eyes were like twin lights, now, and when he spoke there was a crisp finality about each word which was entirely foreign to his ordinary almost lisping speech. Groody always felt a curious sense of confidence when Tom was around in an emergency. The chunky adventurer now looked and acted like the person he was; a brilliant man who could speak five languages fluently and had a mind like a well oiled machine. His body itself seemed larger—capable of the things Groody knew it could perform. Service was the most efficient rough and tumble fighter the airman had ever seen, and he had seen a few.

"By letter writing," Service said crisply, "we mean that in the last two weeks we've had two anonymous letters, one mailed from Chicago and the other from

New York, warning Groody that it wouldn't be good for him to keep on this circus stuff. Threatened him if he continued. It was the consensus of opinion that they were the work of an unbalanced mind, and meant little. Some crazy chap who resented Groody for some reason. It upset us a little, but not importantly. Now it's a cinch that somebody who's keen and clever and a murderer is at work."

"Reilly, did you leave this tent last night?"

"No, sor."

"Was anybody hanging around at all?"

"No, sor. Sparrow was out here until around midnight, but thot wuz all. And I shlept inside the tent on me cot."

"When was the last time you inspected this ladder?" Groody asked.

"Not since the last toim we used it, sor—a week ago."

Service nodded.

"We've guarded things pretty closely, but there's no use kidding ourselves. It might have been done sometime in the past week—that is, there probably have been short spaces of time when a man could have slipped in and done it. We'll check back on that in a minute. The question is—who would want to do such a thing, and why?"

That was what Groody was wondering. With his lean length stretched out on the ground and his long eyes mere slits in his mahogany face, he looked like a brooding eagle. He was conscious of jumping nerves. Strange, bright sunshine, a great city only a few miles away—and he was feeling like a condemned man. Nerves . . .

"Say, George!" Delaney put in excitedly. "You aren't hep to any other flying outfit that's got a grudge against you, or that was after this fifteen hundred a day contract, are you? Somebody that might think if they put you out of the way their own outfit would get it—"

"No," Service said crisply. "Not a one of us is acquainted with any other circus flying outfit, and so far as we know, there's none in this section. I'll check up with the exposition committee, though, and find out whether anybody's been after them to get our job, either before or after we got on the scene. The police can tend to that."

"If it ain't that, what could it be?" said Sparrow Cantoni.

"Might be any one of two things," Service said incisively. Groody was just listening. He did not want to talk, somehow. "In the first place, Groody and I, over the past twelve years, have individually and collectively been in places, had experiences, and been in businesses which have made us a lot of enemies. Some of 'em—"

"Would be capable of anything," Corrigan nodded.

"Exactly. In the second place, it might be just a nut, but that doesn't seem probable."

"Bringing it down to the work of an enemy—some criminal or other—getting revenge. If his object was to murder Groody, why would he have written warning letters? Giving Groody a chance to quit before he was killed?"

"Keep him from makin' the jack!" suggested Cantoni.

The little flyer's fingers were twisting together, and his foot was tapping ceaselessly.

"The only reason I could think of, too. However, Groody doesn't quit, so the unknown goes to murder—which doesn't hang together. Before trying murder, why wouldn't the man do something mild like set fire to the ships, if keeping Groody from working was his only motive?"

"Or, taking the rival flying circus theory," Corrigan pointed out. "Why wouldn't they do the same thing, before going to murder? You don't have to kill an acrobat to keep the act from going on."

Groody sat up. He must snap out of it. Suddenly the old jeering smile was on his face, and his eyes were gleaming with something of the old fire.

"TOM, just what the hell do you think is the most logical explanation?" he demanded. "Something that'll account for those letters, and this thing here?"

The flyer felt as though he could see

Service's mind racing along underneath his blond pompadour.

"I believe that there is behind it a disarranged mind of the same type as most poison pen writers, kidnappers, and the like. I believe that he would undoubtedly murder if it became necessary. Whether he is an enemy of yours or not, from the past, we can't say, but I'm inclined to think that a tenable theory. I believe that the letters can be explained by the very premise I mentioned—a disarranged or unbalanced mind. There've been a million cases of a similar type of intellect which writes letters, leaves a certain mark after each crime, takes a high sounding name for himself . . . You know."

"Well, we'd better see the police," Corrigan stated, "and *pronto.* This stuff has got to be guarded to a fare-thee-well, of course."

The big fellow glanced over at Groody. Groody felt his gaze and met it fairly. He found Tom looking at him, too. Why, the whole bunch were staring at him.

"What's the matter? Am I raising a wart?" he demanded.

"Listen, George," Service said crisply. "Why don't the whole bunch of us take a layoff and throw up this damn' contract?"

"What do you mean?" Groody asked him, taking out another cigar.

"We mean," Corrigan said bluntly, "how's your nerve?"

"I guess it's in good health."

"The hell it is! You'd be inhuman if it was, and you know it."

That was Bob Corrigan, Groody reflected. Never had he known a man with such hatred for hypocrisy or lying. The shaggy headed giant stripped any proposition or problem to its bare essentials, showed it naked to the world, and then drove home the truth. No consideration of politeness, civility, or soft heartedness ever kept Corrigan from laying his cards on the table.

"Listen here," Corrigan went on. "What's the use of kidding ourselves, Tom? George here, for the past six months, has been doing this damn' aerial daredevil stuff. It's getting him, and it ought to get him. George, you're as nervous as a witch, and it's a wonder to me you're not cuckoo."

"You're doing it for that oil acreage in Texas. Tom and I aren't doing a damn' thing. I was worried about it before all this happened. Now, by God, I say to hell with the damn' oil, and take a rest! Why kid yourself, George? You were just one jump ahead of having no nerves at all, even before that wreck came along, and—"

"Have a bad crash?" Delaney interrupted quickly.

"I'll say he did," Corrigan replied.

"Circus stuff?"

"No—that was the hell of it," Groody said slowly. How he wished he could forget it . . .

"He was taking a friend of his—an ex-flyer named Harwell, in Columbus—for a joyride a couple of weeks ago," Corrigan explained. "Forced landing, rough field, ship did a somersault and squashed down upside down. When we pulled 'em out Groody was knocked out and Harwell was dead."

"And his bride had been watching the flight," put in Groody quietly.

"Lord," Delaney breathed, and there was honest sympathy in his eyes as they rested on Groody.

"You'll be stark, staring mad if you don't lay off this stunt flying for a while," Corrigan said flatly. "Give yourself a chance, George."

Groody chewed on his cigar, his mouth stretched into a bleak grin.

"Bob's right, old-timer," Service said gently.

"The hell he is," Groody stated. "If I was losing my nerve the only way to get it back would be to carry on, anyhow—"

"That's the bunk," Corrigan interrupted harshly.

"Sure it is," Delaney put in. He had been listening with absorbed attention. "You've got to be yourself when you're playing around on wings and ladders, George."

"Listen, boys and girls," Groody said slowly.

He had been formulating his thoughts. He would like to lay off. He dreaded the next day. Formerly there had been in his hazardous tasks a temporary satisfaction of some ferocious hunger in him which he could not quite label accurately himself. Something like the savage delight a man took in a good knockdown fight. Sure of himself, his nerve, and his physical strength and coordination, any fear he might have had had been half pleasant excitement.

"This seems to be an experience meeting," he went on mockingly. "And we might as well lay our cards on the table. I *am* fed up, but I'm no cripple. In another two months we make or break in Texas. We need dough bad. And I, for one, am going to have some for the first time in my life. A few nut letters and this sabotage stuff aren't going to turn me back, either. We can inspect before we go up, can't we? Have police protection and all, can't we?

"Listen, Tom. You, too, Corrigan. The three of us have been batting around all over the known world for years. Tom and I have never had a dime since we started. I'm getting to the point where I want a few nickels in my sock in case I feel like joining another revolution or something. Plenty of nickels. And, by Harry, a little old woman stuff inside me, and the rest of it, isn't going to turn me back!"

E FROM Reilly to Delaney, they argued with him. He remained adamant. In the back of his head he was thinking and wondering. All his life he had sought for some elusive thing which he had never been able to find. It was always just around the corner. What he wanted now was bound up, some way, with his present condition. Money, power in the oilfields, adventure . . .

"Listen, the three of you," he said finally. "Don't you get the point? Here we are, over thirty, the bunch of us. In the past we may have all been big. Now we're gypsy flyers—taking a shot at the moon. And it's time the bunch of us got hold of some of the cheese, too. Hell, Tom, we'll never have another such chance. We make or break, in a big way, in the next two months. Forty thousand more and we're set. And you think I'll lay off?"

"O.K, big boy," Service said crisply.

The entire group relaxed, and the strain was over.

"Sparrow, hike for Covington, tell the police the yarn, and tell 'em that we'll be here when they send cops out. Inquire about having at least one cop on guard all the time. I'll tend to the Cincinnati police myself."

"Right. I don't know what good them flat feet'll be anyhow," remarked Sparrow, whose contempt for all police was sublime.

He hopped into the hired flivver which was a feature of the camp equipment, and departed.

"Delaney, would you mind strolling a little distance away for a second?" Service asked him. "There's a little matter which it wouldn't be fair to mention in front of you."

"Sure. I hope it's something that'll persuade George here to lay off, though. I ain't seen you for a long time, George, but I'll be damned if I'd enjoy meeting you dead!"

He strode over to the ships, well out of earshot, and started to inspect them.

"Seems like a good egg," Reilly remarked. "Them passenger carryin' ships are sure a fleabitten outfit, though. No wonder they ain't doin' much."

"Listen, Reilly," Service said, his eyes boring into the mechanic's. "In the light of this ladder here, have you ever noticed anything suspicious about the actions of Sparrow Cantoni?"

"Huh?" gaped the startled Irishman.

He removed his battered cap and gazed at Service in stunned surprise. He scratched his bald head, and his pug nose wrinkled with emotion. Groody's eyes were on Service. Tom's eyes were gleaming through his horn-rimmed spectacles like an owl's at night. When Tom was on a trail every fiber of him became vitalized, always. His mind would not leave the problem for so much as a waking minute until it was solved.

"Ever seen him fooling with the rigging or anything? Was he spending much time in the tent alone last night?" Service went on.

"I'll be damned," Groody breathed to himself.

"Why—why, yes, sor," Reilly stammered finally. "Come t' think of it, Oi did see him foolin' with the ladder. And he was inside, whistlin' away fur some toime. But honest, sor, Sparrow wouldn't—"

"Never mind. I don't think he would either. Three quarters of the criminals in the world, except the habitual ones, you wouldn't figure to have the possibilities they do."

"What's on your mind?" demanded Corrigan.

"Just this. It seems to me that this might more logically be an inside job—this ladder business. You and I and Groody are out of it. So is Reilly. Lucky it was you who found the break in the ladder, Reilly, or we'd be following your trail. That leaves Sparrow.

"What do we know about him? A mechanic with a good record in the Air Service, in spite of a few court martials. A whale of a good flyer. He came up to us for a job; we needed a pilot, tried him out, gave it to him, and he's been a good and faithful pilot.

"What else do we know? That he was born in the Little Italy of New York, that he is familiar with every gangster, racket and dive in the city, and that he's as tough and hardboiled a little wop as ever roamed the streets of a big city."

"But listen, sor!" pleaded Reilly, anguish in his blue eyes. "I been around a lot with Sparrow—you know that. We've got to be pals. Honest, sor, he worships the ground Lieutenant Groody walks on. He's told me a thousand stories about what he heard about the lieutenant in France, and he figgers him as the best flyer and best guy in the world. Honest, sor—"

"Sparrow Cantoni worshipping anybody, least of all, me, is applesauce," Groody said.

"It isn't," Corrigan said flatly. "I've noticed the same thing myself. When you kid the little egg in that hardboiled way of yours he gets a look like a petted dog."

"That's a comedy knockout in itself. That little sucker has a piece of rock for a heart!"

"Maybe so," Corrigan said doggedly. "But a guy like him has his heroes, whether they're the heavyweight champ or the best gunman, or Mussolini, and I believe Reilly's right when he says that the little rat looks up to you. Maybe his admiration isn't great enough to stand in the way of his making a piece of change—"

"Exactly," Service cut in crisply. "In any event, we would be fools to overlook the possibility. And there are two possible motives."

HE WAS driving ahead with the effect of inevitability which Groody always felt in him. It seemed to him that no barrier of deception could withstand the ceaseless battering of Service's mind.

"The first is that some enemies of Groody's, or mine, are willing to pay big money to have a job done to us, and hired Sparrow for the purpose. Better to bump us off flying than take the slightest chance on a bullet. Sparrow may be a professional gunman for all we know. As far as enemies go, between my Government work, Groody's work on the Border Patrol, and our combined services with that circus mess and other things, we've accounted for enough powerful criminals to make it far from an impossibility that big money might be spent to get rid of us. A man stews in jail for a while, and he's pretty apt to come out with murder in his heart. That's item one."

He took off his glasses, polishing them absently.

"The second one would be him as an individual. He's crazy to do the same stuff that Groody's doing."

"Exactly," snapped Groody

He sat up tensely. He was feeling better. As a vague menace changed slowly to a very possible reality before his eyes, a part of the shadow over his spirit lightened. A definite thing to fight made life more attractive.

"I hate to be steaming in a fog," he went on. "Maybe we're doing Sparrow an injustice—I like the little geezer, as a matter of fact—but then, again, maybe we're not."

"What do you mean about his wanting to do the stuff Groody does?" Corrigan asked.

"Just that. You know it. He wants to wingwalk and all that stuff," Groody replied. "Always begging to."

"And we can't let him, because we guarantee to show 'em a man with thirteen German planes to his credit," Service put in. "If something should happen to Groody, Sparrow would be the man—at commensurate pay. He knows we're gambling for fortunes in Texas. Is there anything to keep him from sitting down and figuring a way to cut in on our gold mine?"

Corrigan shook his head. Reilly was staring miserably at the ground.

"And far be it from anybody here to say that Sparrow's absolutely incapable of going to the length of framing Groody—"

"But fur murder, sor!" Reilly interrupted heatedly. "Maybe fur injury or somethin'; but the man thot done this was up t' murder!"

"I know. Let's not get off our base," Tom said tersely. "This is a fact. We must suspect Sparrow, innocent or guilty, and act accordingly. He very possibly is in the pay of the enemy, or shooting for a fortune on his own."

There was a moment of silence. Reilly's face reflected resentful sorrow as he stared at the ground. Groody slowly removed the cigar from his lips. One corner of his mouth drooped.

"For a minute I felt as though I had my teeth in something, and I felt better," he remarked. "But I just thought of something. A detail, as it were.

"If Sparrow was out to get me, for his own or other people's purposes, he doesn't need to do much sneaking around on the ground."

"Meaning?" snapped Tom.

"A little accident in the air . . ."

Groody's voice trailed off as his eyes met the three pairs which were staring at him. Corrigan got to his feet as though he had made a decision.

"That settles it!" he said harshly. "Of course you're right. You're making a ship to ship change by a ladder, we'll say. Just a little dip of the plane, a supposed bump—anything—and you're sunk. Boys, we call off everything, or else we get another pilot."

"Wait a minute, big boy," Groody advised him. He, too, got to his feet and stalked up and down.

"Listen," he said finally. "We've got to go through this, one way or another, for the dough and the future contracts. In the second place, if Sparrow's our man, the only way to catch him is to lay a trap, and watch. It'll be a little inconvenient for me, but it can be done.

"If I'm on guard, he can't hurt me. Take that ship-to-ship change. Instead of me being on the wing of Sparrow's ship, and you flying the ladder, Bob, we just reverse, see? Let him fly the ladder. Then I don't leave your ship until I have a damn' good hold on that ladder. He can't hurt me then, unless he started stunting or something and committed murder in front of forty thousand people's eyes!"

"Hell, Groody," Corrigan exploded hotly. "I won't let you do it, understand? Why, damn it . . ."

"Sure you will," Groody told him, tight lipped. "It won't be so pleasant, maybe, but there shouldn't be too much danger. And that's the way to get the dope, I tell you."

Corrigan gazed at the ground sullenly. Service's eyes were boring into Groody's. George felt as though Tom knew exactly the way he felt. He was nervous and jumpy, stale and next door to being yellow. If it was not for something fundamental—a prize which seemed infinitely desirable at the end of the road—he would be so happy to quit for a while that right then the mere thought seemed like a vista of paradise.

"Figure you're up to it, George?" Tom asked quietly.

"Sure."

"Then it's the best known method to catch Sparrow, if he can be caught," Service said. "He'll fly right into the net, one way or another, if we leave him free enough. So I vote, if George is O.K., to let things go along, taking every precaution.

"It may be a tough strain for a flight or two—but it may save us weeks of worry. A man's got to go to a dentist if he wants to save himself weeks of pain. I wish to Heaven I was the nerve that was going to be bored at, and so do you, Bob, but Groody's got the job."

Suddenly the stocky adventurer's round face became bleak and cruel. His mouth was like a cut across his face, and he bit off his words as he said:

"But if and when we catch the man, Sparrow or no Sparrow, he may not have a chance to be a free boarder at some jail. Not if I get ten minutes alone with him!"

CHAPTER III

THOROUGHBREDS

TEN MINUTES later Delaney came wandering back.

"I didn't notice that before," he remarked, gesturing toward the ships. "You got those ships all wired for little electric lights around the edges of the wings, ain't you?"

"Uh, huh." Groody nodded. "That's for night exhibitions. Takes Reilly here a couple of hours to get 'em fixed.

"Well, boys and girls, we're all set, eh? Tom, you're going to town? I guess I'd better go over and see this Redfield guy. Gosh, it'd be hard to take if we cleaned up enough on a horserace to throw this damn' circus business into the ash can, wouldn't it? Want to go along, Bob?"

"I'd better stay here."

"Certainly," agreed Service. "I'll see the police, talk to the fair people, and see what can be found out and what can be done about it all. The exposition birds won't want anything to happen to us—I guess we'll be able to get cooperation all right."

"Where you going?" Delaney asked in his high voice.

"Over to see the owner of a horse that's going to race Saturday," Groody explained. "Friend of mine owns half the colt, and this bird Redfield, his trainer, the other half."

"Figuring on a killing?" Delaney asked eagerly.

"Don't know, yet."

"Say, George, let me go along, will you? I'd love to get in on a good thing."

Those last words were said so sincerely that the lanky flyer had trouble repressing a grin. For a second Delaney stared at the ground, his bulldog face dark and brooding.

"Probably he and his outfit are dead broke," Groody thought.

For a moment he hesitated. Delaney was certainly moving in, he reflected. He was already calling Groody, George, and the fact that he took a good deal of satisfaction in being intimate with the circus flyers, particularly Groody himself, was as evident as the fact that he was shabby and probably penniless.

"Sure," Groody said finally. "Come along. Crank up No. 1, Reilly, and warm her, will you?"

Five minutes later Groody, another unlighted cigar in his mouth, was easing the Hawk off the ground. He was tense and uncomfortable until the hills had been cleared and he had turned back into a position to land on the field if the motor cut out. Flying of any kind was an ordeal for him, and there was not one iota of pleasure in it.

He hurtled along above the low rolling slopes which merged into real mountains a few miles southward. The eight cylinder Wright roared along smoothly, and at fifteen hundred revolutions it carried the sturdy Hawk through the air at close to a hundred and thirty miles an hour. It was a good ship, Groody reflected. Landing speed scarcely more than forty-eight miles an hour, and built so sturdily that no amount of stunting could hurt it.

He was sweeping the half wooded, half cleared terrain with narrowed eyes. How would he know the breeding farm if there was more than one? They should be close to it now.

There it was. As they swept across the ridge of sizable hills, it lay beneath them—snowy barns, a half mile oval track and a dozen pastures in which mares with their foals were grazing peacefully. Around the barns negroes were moving languidly, and here and there a horse was being worked on.

As the ship, motor cut, circled downward, a good many of the high strung horses used it as an excuse to kick up their heels and get a bit of exercise. As Groody dropped the Hawk across the low white fence around the track, he saw a concerted movement of galvanized negroes from the stables. They poured over the fence in a black wave, and by the time the ship had come to a stop they were surrounding it like flies.

Groody cut off the gas and vaulted to the ground. A short man, so stocky that he might be called portly, pushed his way through the chuckling, somewhat awed darkies.

"George Groody?" he asked in a slow drawl. "I'm Buddy Redfield."

As Groody shook hands and introduced Delaney, he was appraising the former jockey who, Slim had said, could be trusted to the limit. Redfield's face was as round as a full moon, and almost lineless. He was very brown, and when he smiled he looked positively cherubic. Warm brown eyes smiled with his mouth.

"Maybe he was little once, but he outweighs me now," Groody reflected. "Those jockey shoulders and arms, though, tell the tale."

And they did. Redfield's shoulders were thick and strong, and his forearms were positively huge. He was dressed in riding breeches, a white shirt with rolled sleeves and collar open at the neck, and a leghorn hat with the brim turned down all the way around, shading his curiously boyish face. If the exigencies of making weight had ever weazened his face and stunted his body back in the old riding days, there were no signs of them now.

"I'm sure glad to see you," Redfield was saying smilingly. "Slim and I've had a lot of correspondence about you. It's cost more for telegrams in the last three days than it has to feed Prince Regent."

"Well, what's the lay?" Groody demanded. "Wait a minute. Get one of these boys that's reliable to guard this ship, will you? I don't want these babies to swarm all over her."

"Two Spot! If you let one of these boys touch the plant I'm sure going to tan you till you're white!"

"Har! Har! Har!" came a hilarious chuckle, and a bandylegged little negro waddled out of the mass.

"That's our stable jockey," grinned Redfield. "The only rider on earth that can make Prince Regent run. All Two Spot's done, in spite of the white boys, is win the International Match Race, the Belleview Handicap, the Latonia Special last year, and a few other odd stakes."

* * *

"HE MUST be king of the Kentucky colored kingdom," Groody remarked, and Redfield chuckled his assent.

"And how he loves it."

As they drifted away from the ship, it was easy to see that Two Spot was a diminutive black monarch, as befitted a jockey whose name had adorned the headlines of the sporting world on three separate occasions.

"Your letter was received and contents noted," said Groody. "My ears are waving in the breeze to catch what you say."

Redfield grinned, his eyes flickering toward Delaney with an unasked question in them. Groody turned to the burly pilot.

"Don't get sore, but Redfield and I have some private business. I won't hold out on you if there's dough to be made . . ."

"Sure. I understand. I'll sit on the fence down here a piece."

He was so eager to please that it was almost pitiful. He took a seat on the fence rail out of earshot of Groody and Redfield.

"Well," Redfield began in his soft drawl. "How much do you know about Slim and me as owners of a one horse stable?"

"Nothing. Wait till I set fire to this cigar, and shoot the works."

"It's like this," Redfield resumed, pushing his hat down over his eyes. "Three years ago I ran into our horse. He was then an outlaw—nobody could handle him. He'd been ill treated, I guess, until he was scared of men. That was Prince Regent, not worth a dime on a racetrack, just coming three years old, and he was by Rex out of the Dowager, by Redemption."

As he gave that pedigree it seemed that he was speaking in respectful awe of royalty.

"What am I supposed to do—stand in silent prayer?" demanded Groody with a grin.

Redfield chuckled.

"No. But anyhow, that's bred to the purple of horseflesh. Bred for speed and stamina and heart. Anyway, I found out that Prince Regent trusted me. I could buy him for a song. So I hunted for boys that the Prince wouldn't rear back at, snorting and sweating, and try to kill out of sheer fear. And I found little Two Spot Jackson, just a stable boy.

"I had a little money. Slim and I were friends. He had some. We bought the Prince on a gamble. To make a long story short, in the next two years we won three of the greatest stakes on the American track, with me training him and little Two Spot bringing him home. We had to fight crooked gamblers twice, and there were a lot of heartbreaks, but we came through. First year it was my wife's uncle by marriage—a crooked horseman named Kin Beaseley who hated me from my jockey days when I refused to 'pull' a horse for him. Another was a big New York ring. We were meat for 'em, because Prince Regent was a horse to be got rid of. When he's right, there isn't, and hasn't been since Man O' War, a colt that could beat him at any distance from six furlongs to two miles."

"That's taking in plenty of territory," Groody grunted.

"It's the simple truth," Redfield said quietly, but there was unutterable pride in his voice.

"Slim and I," he resumed, "had around seventy-five thousand apiece, net, at the end of last season. Then we put Prince Regent in the Young Handicap at Empire City for a last race. He was odds on favorite. We bet a large and luscious chunk on him, all over the country.

"He went bad in the race, finished third on three legs. We went almost broke, and nobody figured that he'd ever be able to race again. We've had him here a year, me putting in full time on him. Had him at stud a little, which brought in some dough.

"Anyhow, as far as I can see, or anybody else, he's O.K. again, and training soundly. But you never can tell when a horse's legs go bad. I believe he's sound as a dollar. His gallops look great every morning. But Slim and I, between us, haven't got five thousand dollars to our names. I've got a house in Lexington, but Slim—"

"Hell, he probably hasn't got an extra uniform," Groody stated.

Redfield grinned.

"If he has, it's an accident," he admitted. "His spending makes a Broadway butter and egg man look like a miser from Kankakee. Anyway, that's the situation today. Follow racing at all?"

"I used to be a nut on it, but lately I haven't had a chance to follow it at all. I know horses, but I don't know the names of the stake winners since three or four years ago. Why?"

"Read anything about the Latonia Special next Saturday?"

"Seems to me I've seen some newspaper headlines or something."

"You probably have. From now until next Saturday you'll see plenty on the sporting pages, and on Saturday you'll see it all over the front pages. Anyhow, Colonel Winfield, head of the Jockey Club, is staging another one of his Specials—bringing the leading horses from all over the country together for a $50,000 purse. Champs of the East, the winter tracks, and Tia Juana are here, or will be, for that race. And that's the race I'm figuring on for Prince Regent's comeback."

"And the general idea is for me to put up a lot of dough to bet, eh?"

Redfield nodded. For a moment his candid brown eyes searched the narrow gray ones which were glinting down at him. Groody, again, was appraising Buddy Redfield with attempted cynicism which, somehow, would not come off.

"SLIM and I figured, if you were making a lot of money, we might make an arrangement," Buddy said quietly. "I'll know the day of the race whether Prince Regent is right or not. Right, the bet is a lead pipe cinch, unless his leg goes bad again. If there's the slightest doubt, we don't bet. He'll be at good odds, in spite of the fact that he's been national champion two years. Everybody knows he hasn't raced for a year, which is bad for a horse's form on the first few races. Everybody knows his leg went wrong once, and may very possibly go wrong again. In the third place, seventy-five per cent. of the horses in the race will have backers, anyhow. They're champs. Kentucky'll go down hook, line and sinker on the Braden horses. Those Eastern betters'll pile in so much coin on the Whitney entry and Go Way, the Saratoga Cup winner, that it'll be a shame. And the dope I get is that a bunch of California sports—motion picture stars and that bunch—are sending two hundred thousand East to bet on Juniper June, Barney Hutchinson's filly. Others'll have backers, because they're all good. I can't see less than four to one on Prince Regent in the mutuals."

For a moment Groody was silent. That would be forty thousand dollars on a ten thousand dollar bet—and he could kiss the flying circus business goodby.

"What was your idea of the sharing terms?" he enquired.

"It isn't just that," Redfield told him. "I figured it would be better if you bought an interest in Prince Regent. We use that money to bet with. If the horse wins, you and I and Slim divide equally. Purse and winnings. That is, if you've got the money to buy one third interest."

"How much do you figure he's worth?"

"Before he went bad, we turned down a hundred thousand dollars. Figured him worth a hundred and fifty. If he never wins another race, his breeding and record make him good for a stud fee of fifteen hundred, at the very least. Man O' War gets two and a half grand."

"But it would take years to get the money back," Groody ruminated. "On the other hand, if he wins, it's seventeen thousand from the purse, and enough to take an overnight profit on the whole deal from bets. If he wins . . ."

"On that proposition," Redfield said quietly, "there's something else to figure. Any horseman—in fact, every newspaper you read from now to the day of the race—will admit that Prince Regent *was* the best horse in the world. The question is, what is he now?"

"Which is a large inquiry," Groody said.

"I'll know when he comes to the paddock what he is. I've decided, this morning, that he needs a tightener for the big race. So I'm sticking him in an overnight handicap at the track on Wednesday. There'll be several candidates for the Special getting a prep for the big race. Prince Regent won't win, probably, because I'm not going to have Two Spot ride him, and he never would run for another rider. Gets scared and nervous and mean."

"Why not Two Spot?"

"Because I won't take a chance on anything happening to him. White boys gang up on a darkie. Anything might happen. And if Two Spot shouldn't be able to ride Special, we might just as well be without Prince Regent.

"Anyhow, between that race and the end of the week, I'll know. If the Prince's legs stand up in that race, he's O.K. probably. His form I can't be fooled on, because he's honest and no morning glory."

"I buy the share in the horse the day of the race if you say the word, is that it?"

"Right."

"Was that what—the only thing, I mean—that you referred to in your letter to me?"

"No. This whole scheme was figured out by Slim and myself as a means for us all to make a lot of money, before you got here. The letter was about that same Kin Beaseley that I mentioned before."

"Huh?" grunted the surprised Groody. "Hell, where do I come in?"

"I don't know," admitted Redfield. "I guess I just want moral support or something. I'm scared of him. Slim and I beat him once—and had him ruled off the track for life. He can't get into a race track, even, to say nothing of running horses. He's my wife's uncle by marriage, as I said."

"Funny situation," Groody remarked. "Hell, what can he do to you if he can't get into a track?"

"Nothing, probably," Redfield said. "But two or three days ago I got a letter from Mary, my wife, saying she'd seen the old crook, that he was pitifully down and out, and asking me to forgive him and help him make a little dough. He's coming here to see me some day this week.

"He raced horses just to make crooked money. He used batteries, framed races, doped 'em, sponged the other horses, bribed jocks—everything a crooked gambler could think of.

"The point is this. He gives this sob story to my wife. He wants to see me. And I get a rumor—just a rumor—from a friend of mine, that he's secretly interested in two little stables racing around—one called the Wildflower and the other the string trained by One Eyed Farbell."

"It's just a rumor, you say?"

"UH HUH. But I got curious about old Kin. I hate him, but still and all I wouldn't want even Mary's uncle by marriage to starve to death if I could help him along a little. Kin used to own a gambling house in Louisville. When Slim and I spoiled a crooked racetrack coup in Louisville a couple of years ago, we just about cleaned him for his wad, I knew. It was said then that he'd sold the house because he didn't have and couldn't get capital enough for the house bankroll. It was one of those lay-'em-or-take-'em crap layouts. Anyhow, I got a letter yesterday from a friend of mine in Louisville, saying that it was no cinch that Kin didn't still own that house, although he might have taken in partners."

"All of which," Groody ruminated, "means that you're not sure that Beaseley's sob story isn't just a lot of applesauce."

"Exactly," nodded the little horseman quietly. "Then, in this morning's paper, I see an item which has got me all haired up."

"Such as?"

"That the Wildflower Stable, with Slim Casey, trainer, and One Eyed Farbell have each entered a horse in the Special."

"Oho!" grunted Groody. "But still, what of it? Even if Beaseley does own a share . . ."

"Well, one thing about it that might strike your eye," Redfield drawled with a sudden sunny smile, "is that the horses they've entered are two of the worst pieces of crowbait that were ever fed heroin to get a stable feed money in a dog race!"

"And they're entered against the class of the country."

"At a fee of a hundred to enter, and four hundred more to start."

Groody drew in on his cigar.

"Neither horse has a chance?"

"Not a chance, except for a miracle.

The Wildflower Stable entered Peggy B, a little sprinting filly that folds up after six furlongs and couldn't beat 1:13 if she was chased by a lion. One Eye's got Champ in there. Champ was one of the best two year olds that ever ran, but then he went bad, proved to be a quitter at the long distances, and for the last two years has won about two selling plater races a year when they can get him off in front, and whip him all the way around. If another horse looks him in the eye he's beat. If Champ was in his best form, up to his two year old promise, he might have a chance to finish third if all the other horses in the Special fell down or jumped the fence."

"You're figuring on just which?"

Buddy smiled, as though half ashamed of himself.

"Knowing Kin as I do, and likewise those two stables, I got to thinking something like this. Suppose Kin did have some money, and owned a share in those stables. Suppose he figured on putting something over in the Special. His own horses haven't got a chance. But they might do him some good in knocking the favorite out of the purse by bumping or something. What he'd have in his mind, though, I couldn't say for sure. Anyway, though, he knows Prince Regent. He knows if the Prince is right he'll win. So Kin pulls his sob stuff to get in my good graces, get information about the Prince . . ."

"Well, that seems not so unusual. I can't blame him."

"Sure. But I know Kin, of course, hates me like hell. I feel he's up to something. And that something isn't just a bet on Prince Regent if I tell him the Prince is right. It's a crooked manipulation that he'll make a lot of dough on . . .

"Speak of the devil . . . There's the old buzzard now!"

Down near the barns a stocky figure had emerged through the gate to the track. Groody's eyes dwelt on it with a lot of interest.

Beaseley walked with slow, short strides. He was short, and so bulky that his body seemed square. Groody noticed his clothes, first.

"He don't look very prosperous," he remarked.

"He'd wear overalls if he was a millionaire," Redfield told him.

Beaseley was arrayed in baggy, spotted blue pants, a shabby vest of a different color from his suit, and a dirty standup collar, a size too large for him. His battered felt hat was pushed back from a square face which might have been hewn out of granite, and then damaged by the elements.

As he came closer, Groody's dislike for him grew. The man's light gray eyes, shielded partially by heavily drooping lids, were basilisk-like. They protruded from his face, with no more expression in them than the eyes of an idol. The face was like a harsh mask.

" 'Lo, Buddy, "Beaseley said calmly. "I don't suppose you're glad t' see me."

"No, I'm not, Kin."

Groody gazed at Redfield curiously. The serene little horseman, who had fairly radiated warmth and geniality, now seemed to have chilled. That round boyish face showed lines as the mouth thinned and the jaw came forward, and the brown eyes were not glowing and twinkling, but turbulent.

"Heard from Mary?" Beaseley asked.

His eyes turned slowly toward Groody under their drooping lids.

"This is Lieutenant Groody," Redfield told him. "He's bought a share in Prince Regent."

Groody, realizing that Redfield had a purpose in this announcement, said nothing.

"Yeah?" Beaseley said in his deep bass. "The Prince must be lookin' good then, eh?"

He leaned against the fence as Groody thought swiftly:

"Redfield made a mistake there! If he wants to keep the horse's condition a secret, that is—"

"Hell, no," Redfield said casually. "We don't even know yet ourselves. Slim Evans and I were broke, so Groody put up some money. Make it up in the stud, anyway."

Groody's mouth drooped sardonically. Redfield was an artistic liar, at that.

"If we'd figure the Prince to win the Special, we'd have hung on without selling a share," the ex-jockey continued.

Beaseley whittled a stick with slow, heavy motions.

"You say you heard from Mary?" he said.

"Uh-huh. She said you were in tough luck."

"I am, Buddy. You sure put me on the chutes that time in Louisville. Not that I blame you. I done wrong."

"What do you want from me, Kin? A loan?"

"No. I ain't broke. I got a few hundred left—and nothin' else. I'd like a chance to bet what I got where it'd do the most good, Buddy. There ain't nothin' in that race that kin beat the Prince if he's right. And he'll be big odds. You know I know the hoss about as well as you do, on account o' all them days when you was breakin' him in."

"I see," Buddy said. "Well, Kin, I'll tell you. Don't get me wrong. But I've got no use for you, and you know it. I'm no angel, and I don't say that there aren't a lot of thieves and crooked gamblers in this world that I couldn't like, and maybe they are better men than I am. But I'll be damned if I'd spit on a man that would stick a sponge up a horse's nose and let the poor brute be whipped around a racetrack with his breath cut off, like you did, if he was afire!"

BEASELEY'S heavy lids raised slowly, like curtains. His snake eyes reflected no emotion, but as they rested on Buddy's taut face Groody, somehow, felt chill.

"However," Buddy went on, "on account of Mary, I'll tell you what I'll do. On the day of the race you give me what money you want to bet. If I bet on the Prince myself, I'll bet yours. If I don't figure it a cinch, I won't. If we win you do. How's that?"

"That ain't it, exactly," Beaseley mumbled, his head bent over his whittling. Suddenly he looked up. "Friend o' yours?" he enquired.

Delaney was rejoining the party in a tentative, questioning way. The burly flyer approached like an uncertain dog wagging his tail in the hope that he was welcome.

"This is Mr. Delaney," Groody told him. "It's all right."

"Thought it might not be a private party any more," Delaney grinned.

"It's like this, Buddy," Beaseley went on. "You know me. I been a horseman all my life. I know 'em. When I got all the dope, I can judge a race as good as any man."

"Or better," Buddy said. "If you weren't a crook, Kin, you could have made a fortune on the track."

"I guess so. But the favor I'm askin' you is this, Buddy. I ain't sayin' that you ain't a good judge. But I had more experience. If the Prince don't run or ain't right, there ain't another bet in the race. Too evenly matched, a bunch of 'em. If the Prince is right, he's a standout. Let me hang around with you, Buddy, will you? This four hundred I got—if she goes, I'm flat broke. Not enough t' pay my board bill. If I bet it, I want to be sure. Lemme watch the Prince's works, look him over and get all the dope."

"Look up here, Kin Beaseley!"

It was Redfield's voice, a peculiar tremor in it that suddenly made Groody's spine tingle. Slowly the trainer's big head raised, and those basilisk eyes were staring into Buddy's.

"Pretty smart, Kin, pretty smart!" Buddy snarled. "Want to hang around, do you, and get all the dope? Not satisfied to let me bet for you! Know why you want to hang around? You wouldn't bet a dime on the Prince. If you think he'll win you'll see to it that he don't, damn you, so you can cash in on some scheme of your own!"

So far as Groody could see, Beaseley had not even winked. His stare was almost hypnotic. Buddy, somehow, was like a nervous dove in front of a snake.

"Redfield's sure scared of him," Groody was thinking. "There *must* have been some dirty pool played in the past."

"Furthermore," Redfield rushed on, "you'd rather see me lose this race than win money for yourself!"

His words fairly crackled.

"Don't try to kid me, Kin Beaseley! I've known you too long and too well. You've hated me ever since I wouldn't fall for your crooked stuff when I was a jockey. Remember your tortured 'battery' horses? Remember your crooked jockey coming up the stretch beating Prince Regent and little Two Spot with his whip? Remember the Prince staggering around the track with a sponge up his nose? And you expect me to kiss you and let you hang around my horse!"

Groody's eyes were so narrow they were mere slits in his face. He found himself leaning tautly forward, dead cigar in his fingers. Redfield's placid shell had cracked wide open, and there was abysmal hatred and hot contempt in every line of his face and every word that he spoke.

Beaseley's pose, leaning against the fence, did not change. His eyes never left Redfield's. Unwinking and cold, they merely stared.

But as Redfield concluded, they did change. It seemed to Groody that blood fairly rushed into them. They seemed to roll, momentarily, like those of a maddened horse.

Beaseley made one swift motion. He threw the stick he had been whittling to the ground. His knife, unheeded, went with it. For just a second, the harsh faced horseman was the epitome of fury.

Then, as quickly as the storm had risen, it seemed to calm. His lids dropped over his eyes, like a frog's. He bent to pick up his knife.

"All right, if that's the way you feel," he said slowly.

"Furthermore, you're not to come within a mile of Prince Regent, understand? And no other stranger will, either," Buddy warned him. He had better hold of himself, now. "I'm moving into the track tomorrow, Kin. I'll be living at Ma Foster's. You know the address and the phone number. My offer still stands. You can shoot your four hundred on Prince Regent, and you'll know all I know about the horse. But if you come anywhere near him, I'll chase you out with a horsewhip!"

CHAPTER IV

"THAT'S WHAT I CALL WORKING UNDER A HANDICAP"

THEY watched the horseman wander down the track. No one said a word. Redfield, breathing hard, was trying to calm himself. Finally Delaney said—

"I don't know what it was all about, but it's plain you and him ain't brothers."

"Not exactly," grinned Groody. "Well, you called his hand, Redfield, and I'm damned if I don't believe you had the boy right. Your offer of giving him full information was all a man could ask, and that other stuff didn't hold water for me."

"Sure I had him right," Buddy nodded. "Don't ever forget three items with Kin. He's a natural born confidence man, for one thing. He'd rather make a crooked, 'smart' dollar than a straight one. Second thing is that I'm sure now he's got some scheme to make more dough than he could betting on the Prince. Third is that for ten years he's hated me—and he'd pay money to get even for all I've done to him. If he can combine all three—what could be sweeter?"

"Practically nothing," admitted Groody. "You and I apparently are in the same fix, eh, Buddy?"

"You're sure a persecuted pair," Delaney chuckled.

It was infectious, being a high pitched giggle that issued from his stalwart body like a mouse's squeak from a lion.

"What do you mean?" Redfield enquired.

"I'll tell you later. Say, how about getting a look at this horse?"

"Sure. Come along, Delaney."

"Say, old top, not that I want to be curious," Groody said, as he stalked along, "but isn't there any control over Kentucky racing? The way you bandy around crooked races, and figure Beaseley can get away with anything—"

"Sure there is," Redfield returned promptly. "A damn' sight better control than in New York or Maryland, or the winter tracks, either. But all they can do is weed out crooks as fast as they find 'em, and it's tough. There are too many ways to pull a horse that can't be found out. Horses'll run just for the exercise, when they're not ready. And if one horse and jock deliberately bump another, and knock him out of winning, all they can do is disqualify and maybe suspend the jock and the horse—and that don't get the race for the bumped horse if he came in third, does it?

"It's a lot better than it used to be, but it's foolish to say that a smart bunch can't get away with a crooked race or two in spite of all the veterinaries, stewards, patrol judges and starters in the world."

They were approaching the barns, which impelled Groody to ask—

"Why have you stayed out here with him so long?"

"Better for him, for one thing. Weren't sure he was right, for another. In the third place, keeps everybody from knowing just what condition he's in."

"Thereby knocking down the odds when he runs, eh?"

"Sure. If Slim and I spent twenty thousand bucks in a year, and work and labor over the horse night and day, we got a right to cash in a little on our investment, haven't we?"

"I'll say!" piped Delaney. "Say, George, you're gonna let me in on this, ain't you?"

"Sure, when and if ripe," Groody told him. "Hell, you know most of it now."

He laughed at himself inwardly. Delaney had certainly succeeded in casually becoming a party to a number of personal problems and activities of one George Groody.

"I'll go in and get him," Redfield said, as they walked down the wide space between two rows of barns. Royal equine heads protruded from the open top doors of many of the box stalls.

"Brood mares, studs, some two year olds and horses needing a little vacation and fixing up," Buddy explained. "Stay here, and don't come very close."

He walked toward a stall, the top door of which swung open. As he approached he started talking, low and soothingly.

When he had practically reached the door, a regal black head appeared, and Prince Regent whinnied his pleasure. A moment later Buddy was leading him out into the flooding autumn sunshine.

The tall flyer stood motionless, one leg partially bent. He did not speak nor draw in his breath as Delaney did. But something seemed to turn over inside him, and he felt that he was doomed, financially, from that moment.

Neck arched over as the short Redfield held him close under his lower jaw, Prince Regent pranced forth. As black as a cloudy midnight and as sleek as condition and care could make him, he was as royal as his name.

Delaney moved.

"Good Lord, what a horse!" he exploded.

PRINCE REGENT'S head snapped up, almost swinging Redfield from his feet. The thoroughbred half reared, his great black eyes rolling slightly as he snorted his fear and mistrust of the strangers.

It was one of those momentary visions which, curiously enough, are destined never to be forgotten. In that high flung head and tense black body, gleaming in the sunshine, there was as beautiful a picture as Groody had ever seen. Something in the majestic black held a siren's line, and to own even a share of that horse meant much to him then.

For a second he could scarcely fathom his feeling. In just an instant the horse became a combination of all things desirable. Now he could understand the feelings of Buddy and Slim. What men thought of their home, their dog, their favorite car and prize rifle, plus something deeper and more personal, were the emotions he felt as his eyes caressed the perfect thoroughbred dancing before him.

"Well, I'll be damned," he remarked, trying to laugh himself out of it. "Down in Texas and out through the West, they've got a thousand yarns about old-timers going cuckoo chasing wonderful wild stallions that they've got a worse yen to own than they ever got over a woman. I used to sit and laugh at the stories about the Pacing White Stallion, but damned if I don't understand them now!"

The Prince was restless, but Buddy had been crooning softly to him. The horseman smiled.

"Wonder why we valued him at a hundred and fifty thousand?" he inquired, "and then didn't sell him?"

"Hell, no."

"And wait till you see him run. He—"

Tearing around the corner of the barns, yelping ecstatically, came the most disreputable dog Groody had ever seen. The Prince whinnied.

"This is Hooch, his stable companion," grinned Buddy. "Hooch and Two Spot—they're the Prince's sidekicks. Everybody else but me, he's scared of."

The flop eared, scraggly tailed, nondescript pup made a flying leap at Prince Regent's nose. The stallion belted him playfully, and knocked him sprawling. Hooch got up, tongue out, and they grinned at each other.

Groody knew something about horses. Now that the first shock of the Prince's appearance was over, he could look him over without being affected too much by an equine personality.

Long barreled, trim legged, mighty chested, he was all that a horse should be, plus sturdy haunches which seemed formed for the special purpose of hurling that body through the air in bounds a bit longer than any other horse could cover.

"He's just a shade high in flesh," Redfield told him. "But if he trains soundly this week, has a race under his belt on Wednesday, he ought to go to the post Saturday in the pink."

"In which case," Groody said, "he'll be a cinch to win, you think?"

"I do," Redfield replied, unhesitatingly. "Listen, Groody, tomorrow morning early we're going to run him a mile over a dirt road a little ways from here. It's a straightaway and we can get a line on his speed. Why don't you come over tomorrow morning at dawn and watch him work? If he does that mile the way Two Spot will handle him in 1:40 or under, and doesn't pull up lame, it'll mean something."

"O. K." Groody nodded. "Now let me see if I've got this straight? We can buy a third share in Prince Regent for thirty-three thousand dollars.

"Uh-huh."

"That share goes for everything," Groody went on. "That is, I get one third of the purse, if he wins, and one third of the winnings on a thirty-three thousand dollar bet which the stable will make with my money."

"Exactly. Have you got that much money, Groody?"

"No," Groody told him. "We have about ten thousand in the bank to handle the circus with, but we send most of the heavy dough that we've been making down to Texas, to keep an oil proposition, that we're in on, going without borrowing money. We could get twenty thousand or so from Texas for a few days, but this gamble would be an awfully big one for us. If we lost it, we'd have to borrow money at a terrifically high rate of interest, or else sell out a share in what we think is a sure thing, for much less than it's worth."

"You're in about the same situation," Redfield smiled, "as Slim and I are on the horse."

"Just about," Groody admitted. "Well, as far as I'm concerned, if Prince Regent's in good shape Saturday, I believe I'd take a chance. Of course, I'll have to talk it over with the other boys. It's their money as much as mine. I'll see them about it tonight, and I'll see you in the morning, eh?"

"Right," said Redfield.

"Gosh," Delaney broke in. "Talk about shooting at the moon!"

"Sounds like it, doesn't it?" Groody remarked. "But if it should go through, don't forget that I wouldn't have to be climbing around airplanes any more."

"You were going to tell me something," Redfield reminded him. "Something about being persecuted."

"Oh, yes," Groody replied. "We're having a little tough luck of our own."

He went on to describe briefly the menace which was hanging over the Groody Flyers. Redfield listened without a word, his round face very serious and his level eyes never leaving Groody's for a moment. When the lanky flyer had finished, the little horseman drew in his breath.

"That's what I call working under a handicap," he said slowly. "Of course, you can take every precaution to guard your equipment from now on—"

"Yes," Groody interrupted, "but it's a hell of a feeling to wonder what's going to happen to you at any given moment. In fact, it's such a hell of a feeling that the more I think of shooting a wad on Prince Regent, the more it appeals to me. I'll be here in the morning, and don't be surprised if the deal is on."

CHAPTER IV

JOE PAINTERFIELD

IT HAD not been light more than fifteen minutes the next morning when Groody and Redfield were standing beside a narrow, soft dirt road which ran past the boundary fence of the stock farm. It was as straight as an arrow, and three quarters of a mile away, Prince Regent, with Two Spot on his back, was plainly visible. The rider was cantering his horse down toward the starting line of the measured mile. The road cut through a wooded area, and Redfield pointed out:

"Don't forget that this clay will make it at least four or five seconds slower to the mile than a regular track. Two Spot is going to let him out, and if he does it in 1:45 under wraps and pulls up sound, it'll mean plenty."

"Well," Groody remarked, "this little gallop's quite a gamble in itself, then. Now that the boys have made up their minds to shoot the wad on your say-so, I'm damned if I'm not all worried for the colt myself."

Redfield glanced down the road and put his field glasses to his eyes.

"They're about there," he said. "Is your stop watch ready?"

"All set," returned Groody. "Just give me the word."

They were entirely alone. Redfield had forbidden any of the farm laborers to come anywhere near. He did not want any news of Prince Regent's racing condition to reach the outside world. He held the field glasses to his eyes steadily, focused on a groom who held a white handkerchief in his hand at the starting point. Prince Regent was cavorting about, fairly crying to run.

"He's got the handkerchief in the air," Buddy said. "Get ready—he's off!"

Both men clicked their stop watches that second. Groody strained his eyes toward the small moving speck which was hurtling down the road toward him. As it grew larger, Redfield, the glasses to his eyes, started talking evenly.

"He's running like a dream," he said, his voice curiously vibrant. "His stride is just as free as it ever was, as far as I can see. He's not favoring that leg at all. Two Spot's holding him in, too."

"Looks good, does he?" Groody asked him.

"As good as he ever did, so help me! Look at him come! He's running like a house afire. Good Lord!"

"What happened?" barked Groody. "Fell off, didn't he?"

A quarter of a mile down the track the

figure of the jockey leaning close over his horse's neck, had suddenly disappeared. As Groody strained his eyes to see he thought that the jockey's body had again become visible.

"No, he didn't fall off," Buddy told him tensely. "But he came damn' near it. Looked as though he was knocked right off the horse's back. Threw the Prince off his stride, too."

They were silent for a few seconds as the great black thundered toward the finishing line. Redfield had the glasses trained on Two Spot—it seemed that he had forgotten about the horse. Two hundred yards from the finishing line an oath dropped from his lips.

"Two Spot's shirt is covered with blood!" he exclaimed, and suddenly his boyish face was haggard.

"Hell's bells," Groody cried. "What—"

"As sure as God made little apples," Redfield interrupted, "they were shot at from those woods!"

The next second the stallion rushed past the finishing line. The grave faced little darkey on his back tried to pull him up, but it was plain that there was little strength in those powerful arms and shoulders of his. The left side of his blue shirt was wet with blood.

"If that's what happened," Groody said slowly, "I'll chase whoever did it with the plane."

Both men were running at top speed after Prince Regent. Jackson finally succeeded in bringing him to a halt, but before they had reached him, the boy had almost fallen off the horse's back.

"What happened?" Redfield gasped, breathing hard.

"Don't know, suh," stammered the little jockey. "But I think I was shot."

Groody was removing the blouse. In a moment what had happened was plain to them. A bullet had plowed its way across Two Spot's right shoulder, making a deep flesh wound.

For just an instant his eyes and Redfield's met. It was Redfield who spoke first, and his words were very slow.

"There was somebody out in those woods, and I don't know who they were after, but it was probably the horse," he said. "It's somebody that doesn't want Prince Regent to run, and they tried to kill him."

"Kin Beaseley?"

"Ten to one it's him or one of his men."

The little horseman's eyes were full of the same demoniacal rage which Groody had seen in him the day before.

"Well, that means that I get into action," Groody said swiftly. "I'll get into the air right now and if there's anything stirring in this vicinity, I'll follow it. You get the police under way and tell them to follow my plane when they get here. I can stay in the air for three hours on the gas I've got if I find anything, and they can bet their bottom dollar that there'll be something to chase underneath my plane."

He ran toward the fence with long strides that ate up the distance, vaulted it, and a minute later was starting the engine. Redfield had remained behind to cool off the stallion.

GROODY warmed up the eight cylinder Wright briefly.

"There's no wild rush at that," he soliloquized. "Whoever it was can't get far from here before I get into the air."

Suddenly he remembered his stop watch. He had clicked it automatically when Prince Regent had crossed the line. He took it out of his pocket and stared at the figures.

"1:46," he reflected, "and the horse was thrown off his stride, had a wounded jockey, and was running on that road. He is a horse!"

He put away the watch and read the instrument board quickly. Oil pressure, air pressure, temperature, the charging rate of the battery—all were satisfactory. He shoved at the throttle and sent the sturdy plane flashing across the level infield. He circled the field but once, climbing as steeply as the motor would allow. Flying automatically, his mind was centered on two things. One was the picture of Prince Regent eating up the distance with gigantic strides as he bore down upon the finishing line. The feeling which he had had the day before when he had first seen the black stallion, had been deepened and strengthened by the sight of the horse in action. The thought of some thug in the woods seeking to destroy that beautiful animal was for the moment almost as revolting as the attempted murder of a human being would have been. It was a tight lipped, hard eyed pilot who sent his ship skimming over the trees, in search of its prey.

Groody had his head over the side of the cockpit, searching the ground with his eyes. When he got over the section of woods alongside the spot where Two Spot had reeled from the saddle, he brought the Hawk down until its under carriage was almost sweeping the trees. The bullet had come from Two Spot's left, and the woods extended for about five hundred yards from the road. At the edge of the trees there was another road which led back into the mountains.

"Ten to one he had an automobile planted here," Groody thought to himself. "He isn't in those woods, I think. And he couldn't have figured on an airplane chase."

He sent his plane higher to get a view of as much of the road as possible. It curved around the foothills, and as he reached a thousand feet, he could see that it wove its tortuous way straight back into the mountains. Groody could not decide whether the chances were that the fugitive would have made for the mountains or for town. There was no traffic at this early hour for him to lose himself in, until he reached the outlying districts of Covington.

"Depends on who he is, I suppose," Groody reflected. "If he's a mountaineer, hired for the job, he'd make back for the mountains. If he's some racetrack crook, probably for the city."

The altimeter read twenty-five hundred feet when a section of the road which curved around the sides of a sizable hill came into view for the first time. It was at least ten miles away, and an automobile, crawling around the edge of the mountain like a bug, was raising clouds of dust behind it.

"Ten to one that's the bird I'm after," Groody thought exultantly, and opened the Wright wide.

He sent the ship into a power dive and held it there until the air speed meter needle quivered wildly at two hundred and twenty-five miles an hour. He was above the car in less than five minutes.

He spiraled down above it with the motor half throttled. His eyes left the car for a moment to search the ground for a possible emergency landing field. Not even at a moment like this could he keep his mind from the possibility of the motor's going wrong. He felt a curious tingle which was caused largely, he realized, by fear of what might lie before him. Two months ago he would have looked forward to the emergency ahead with a sort of fierce enjoyment. He hated himself for the foreboding within him, and he put his plane into a steeper dive, as though to prove to himself that he was not afraid. Every nerve was jumping as he realized that in addition to any peril which might lurk in the car below him, there was not a possible landing place within five miles. Should the motor fail it would mean sending his ship hurtling into the trees at sixty miles an hour.

He tried to forget these things as he concentrated his attention on the automobile. It was now only four hundred feet below him and he could see that it was a battered Ford. It had but one occupant, the driver, and the man did not seem to be paying any attention to the ship above him.

"He's making that lizzy do all she can do," Groody thought. "If he's my meat, the farther back into the mountains he gets the better from his point of view."

THE FLYER circled widely back of the car, getting so low that his right wing tip was almost brushing the trees on the slope. With motor full on he sent the plane darting along above the road. As he overtook the car, he tried to discern a gun of some kind in it. The unknown marksman would have used a rifle, he had decided—a revolver would have necessitated his being too close to the road.

The driver glanced up at him as he swept by, and waved his hand.

"If that's the boy I'm after, he's a nervy cuss," Groody reflected.

He banked his plane steeply and a moment later was sweeping back toward the car. The ship was not more than fifteen feet high, and Groody angled slightly to the right to get an unimpeded view of the vehicle. Suddenly his eyes became narrower behind their goggles, and he felt himself tense. He could not be sure, but he had thought that he could see, through the open windshield, the barrel of a rifle leaning against the rear seat.

It was useless, he decided, to attempt to learn anything from the air. That rifle barrel might have been his imagination, but he did not think so. His brain was working swiftly in an endeavor to formulate a plan. It was useless, he realized now, to put any faith in the arrival of officers. Before they could possibly arrive, his gas would be practically gone, and he would have to fly very high, also, to enable them to see him. Suddenly he realized that there was but one thing to do—and that he had been subconsciously trying to avoid it.

"Trying to sneak out on the proposition," he flayed himself savagely, "because I'm a jump nerved old woman."

In a second his mind was made up. If that man down there was the stranger who had shot from the woods, his capture was of infinite importance. It might mean the difference between a fortune and poverty. Groody had never loathed himself more than he did then, when he realized that possibly the whole fate of the Texas oil venture depended on the uncovering of any plot against Prince Regent.

It was an unhappy, bewildered pilot who sent his ship skimming across the crests of the hills toward a stretch of road which he had spotted from the air two minutes before. There was a valley about five hundred yards wide, which the road crossed. There were clearings on each side of it, and what seemed to be an abandoned cabin. It had evidently been a small farm. Groody's lean face was drawn, half because of the task before him, and half because of the misery within.

He crossed the valley, banked around, and jammed on full top rudder. As though to assuage the self-contempt within him, he sideslipped down the wooded slope with such speed as almost to blow his goggles from his eyes. He brought the ship level, its nose pointed up the road in the direction from which the car was coming. There was barely room between the crumbling fences on each side of it to allow clearance for the wings, but he landed safely on the rutted dirt road. It seemed that now that the die was cast, he was momentarily the Groody of old. He forgot his premonitions of disaster as his mind worked swiftly on a plan of campaign.

He taxied the ship to the point where the level valley merged with a hill. The hillside was thickly wooded. He cursed the fact that he was not carrying a gun. It left but one thing for him to do.

He cut off the ignition, leaped out of the plane and in a moment was hidden in the thick undergrowth alongside the road, at a point about fifteen feet up the hill from the ship.

Scarcely a moment had passed before he heard the throbbing engine of the laboring Ford. It clattered over the crest of the hill and he heard the brakes squeal as the surprised driver applied them. Groody was on one knee in the bushes, as the Ford coasted slowly down the slope. He saw the driver as it came to a stop almost opposite him. The man reached over into the back seat and picked up a rifle. His eyes finally left the airplane and swept the valley quickly as he climbed out of the car, rifle in hand.

For a moment the lanky flyer studied the stranger who, he was now sure, was his prey. He was greatly surprised at what he saw.

The alert driver who was standing beside the car was no crude mountaineer, that was certain. He was dressed neatly, even fashionably, in riding breeches and boots, a trim coat, and a soft white shirt. His necktie was vivid and the Panama hat which he wore, looked like an expensive one.

A minute which was an eternity for Groody passed. He was sure that he was invisible to the stranger, for he felt that if he was visible, by any chance, the episode would end before it started—as far as he was concerned. If the man waited much longer he would be certain of an ambush. It had been Groody's hope that he would start for the plane before having a chance to think.

THE PLANE blocked the road and there was no way in which a car could be driven around it. Suddenly the stranger's eyes focused on the thicket which screened Groody. It was the first time the flyer had had a good look at his opponent's face.

It was young and hard, although the regular features were well cut. Perhaps it was the eyes which made his whole countenance look as though it had been chiseled from gray rock. They were cold and bright and blue, set a little too closely together.

For a few seconds Groody thought that he had been discovered. Then, as though the man had comprehended the situation, he turned toward the car and started to climb back into it. There could be but one reason for this—he was going to turn around and try to flee the scene.

That instant Groody made his move. It was but fifteen feet from him to the car.

The bushes crackled as he launched his towering form toward the car. The stranger whirled like a flash but before he could raise the rifle, Groody had his right hand on the barrel and his left fist had crashed against the man's jaw. He staggered back against the car and in a second Groody had wrested the rifle from him easily.

"Sorry, old man," the flyer said sardonically. "And I might be wrong."

The man's hat had fallen off, revealing curly blond hair, which added to the youthfulness of his appearance. Groody had the rifle in his hands loosely, covering his opponent. For a moment the two men studied each other. The stranger's blue eyes were ablaze and his thin mouth was twisted in a contemptuous sneer.

"I know damn' well you're wrong," he said coolly. He had a strong Southern accent. "Now, big boy, just tell me what the hell you mean by all this stuff?"

"Before I tell you that," Groody countered, "you might tell me what you mean by taking a pot shot at a racehorse and a jockey a few minutes ago."

"What're you talkin' about?" demanded the stranger. "I dare you to throw away that gun and give me just one crack at you!"

Groody's mouth drooped quizzically. The man was three or four inches shorter than he, and slender as well.

"Feeling a little sore, are you?" Groody inquired. "Well, if I'm wrong, I don't blame you. Where were you going, what are you doing with this rifle in your car, and—"

"None of yore damn' business!"

"Well," Groody agreed mockingly, "maybe it isn't. Let's take a look at this baby."

He inspected the rifle quickly. One cartridge had been fired.

"Looks pretty bad for you, young fellow," Groody informed him. "In fact, I don't think the law would consider me a damn' fool if I carried you back to Covington and let them find out what makes you tick. A horse is shot at; there's nobody in the woods when we get there; there's just one car in sight and it's driven by a man who's got a rifle which has shot one cartridge very recently. Got anything to say?"

He studied the man's face with mounting interest as he waited for the reply.

There were lines there which expressed experience, and its good looks were of the sort which cannot camouflage the hardness beneath. The young fellow's face was like a mask from which the eyes of a cunning, merciless soul looked forth. There was not a trace of warmth or humaneness discernible in his makeup.

"I don't even know what you're talking about," he said finally. "What's all this business of shooting a horse and the rest of it?"

Groody told him briefly.

"And so," he finished, "you're going back with me. Now, there's just one chance for you to help yourself, young fellow. If you come clean with me and tell me who you work for, and what the idea behind all this is, we might come to terms. Who are you?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" sneered the stranger. He was apparently unafraid.

"That's the reason I asked you," Groody told him affably. "How much did you get from Kin Beaseley for this little job?"

FOR a moment the man's eyes blazed into Groody's with hate and contempt in them, and Groody was aware of a feeling of admiration at the indomitable quality which he sensed in his captive.

"You'll have to watch him as long as there's a kick left in him," he thought to himself.

Suddenly a remarkable change came over the stranger's face. That thin mouth widened in a smile which exposed even, white teeth and he threw up his hand in a gesture of half humorous resignation. As he spoke, Groody thought he could detect a trace of mountain dialect in his words. There was a suspicion of "hyar" when he said "here", and the flyer thought to himself—

"I'll bet he sprang from these mountains, at that."

"I guess you've got me," the man said smilingly. "There's no use of Joe Painterfield's taking a rap for the boys higher up if he can get out of it. Maybe we can make a trade."

"That's a sensible way to talk," Groody approved. "But get this straight. The most I'll do for you is to see to it that all of us who would have reason to appear against you, will pull our punches in court. The more you tell us that's straight, the easier you're going to get off. Don't kid yourself into thinking that there's any chance of your bounding off in that aged flivver of yours."

Painterfield was almost jaunty. It was as though the affair were purely an annoying incident as he said lightly:

"That would be too good a break to be true. I thought maybe I could get away with it."

"Well," Groody reminded him, "being that you can't, we'll get started. It's Kin Beaseley, of course; but what I'm crazy to know before I load you in that airplane and give you a free ride, is what's behind it. Does he just hate Redfield that much, or has he got some idea of winning the Special, Saturday?"

"You're off on the wrong foot, pardner," Painterfield said gaily.

His neatly trimmed blond hair was tossing in the breeze, and when he smiled, he looked more like an attractive young collegian than what he was. His words were marked with the argot of the sporting world—the track particularly.

"Yes?" returned Groody.

"A couple of yesses," nodded Painterfield. "I don't know who this Kin Beaseley is that you talk about, unless you mean the bozo that was ruled off the track a year or two ago. But he wouldn't know me from Adam."

"You don't say? Well, who do you work for?"

"You'll be surprised," Painterfield told him. "But don't think that I'm going to shoot off my mouth up here in the tall timber with you. I'm going to get credit for what I've got in the dope sheet right at headquarters. You could doublecross me too easy, you know. I could give you the works up here and then when I got to the jail house, find out that you were going to put me over the road for the limit, regardless. I get my promises from the bulls and the district attorney before I wiggle the jaw, see? And what I've got to tell 'em is going to make the past members of the Kentucky Jockey Club turn over in their graves and grunt!"

"You interest me strangely," Groody told him, his mouth widening in a lopsided grin. "I can hardly wait, so I guess I'll just tie up your hands and load you aboard the ship. Something big in the wind, eh?"

"You don't think I'd be pulling a racket like this for chicken feed, do you?" Painterfield inquired. "All right. Tie 'em up."

* * *

GROODY, watching Painterfield narrowly, went over to the ship and got a length of rope from the tool kit. Then he directed his captive to stand at one side of the fuselage and rest his wrists upon it. Groody, from the other side, bound them firmly while Painterfield mocked him with light hearted badinage.

"You're not exactly downhearted," Groody remarked.

"Hell, no," grinned Painterfield. "There's going to be many a backer for me before this race is over. Say, pardner, there's men that would hate to have me talk, who could own a stable of judges if they wanted to."

"Think you may get off without doing any talking, eh?" Groody suggested. "Well, I don't wish you any more hard luck than you deserve, because that's plenty; but if you do get away with this, you'll have to go some. Give me a hand and we'll pick up the tail here and turn her around for the takeoff. You can lift even if your hands are tied."

"Oh, I ain't figuring on getting off altogether," Painterfield admitted. "But I ain't figuring on having it socked to me, either."

The two men picked up the tail of the ship and carried it around until the plane was pointing down the valley.

"I'm going to put you in the front seat, Groody told the racetrack man, "so that I can keep an eye on you. Having had my own hands tied behind my back at various times, I know how it feels, so I gave you a break. The first false move you make, though, you're going to have your head caressed with a monkey wrench, so don't try any."

He helped Painterfield into the front cockpit and then started the motor. It idled along gently while Groody stood, watching the instrument board. The ship had controls in each seat, but there was no instrument board in the rear.

"By the way," Painterfield shouted in his ear, "you'd better get that Ford out of the road. Drive it to one side, will you? I don't want any one to run into it before I get a chance to send for it."

"Sure," Groody returned, and walked toward the Ford. It had no self-starter, and the cranking shaft was within five feet of the tail of the plane. Groody tried repeatedly to start it, but the motor would not catch.

"I'm going to push this damn' thing," he decided, "instead of working myself to death on this crank."

Just as he put his weight against the radiator, the gentle clatter of the idling airplane motor rose to a frenzied roar. In a split second the startled Groody had whirled around.

"Painterfield's elbow must have hit the throttle!" he thought. Then— "By Harry, he can fly!" He saw the tail of the ship go up and realized that Painterfield was pushing the stick forward.

The plane was under way.

TO BE CONTINUED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Anyway, He Knew Our Lingo

FROM all parts of the country responses such as this keep coming. Every single one seems to state the same fact—that His Royal Highness was a regular chap, one who made friends and admirers wherever he journeyed.

You had just orter be ashamed of yourself, ruinin' that feller's pertater crop down Aripeka way. Which means that I've just read the February 15th camp-fire, and if you can send me the original of that "frenzied" letter and if it don't bear the ear-marks of one of your clever editorial cubs—why the Volsteads are on me, that's all. Either that, or you ought to proposition Mr. E. A. O'Neal to correspond with you "reg'lar"!

However, what I really started to tell you was that I can possibly add a bit of further corroboration to Edgar Young's theory that his old tramping pal was Albert of Belgium. Might easily have been (assuming, of course that the Belgic archives don't alibi Albert too convincingly!)

A bit after the war, you may remember, Albert and the queen and the prince, his son, toured America, including the far-famed Yosemite Valley, near which I happen to have a country home. What I saw happened on the royal party's trip out from Yosemite, and if you don't mind the digression, something that happened *before* they left is a good joke on our West where men are men (when they don't get mixed up at birth).

A couple of professional Yosemite guides took the Prince in tow when he insisted on climbing around Glacier Point, which happens to be about three thousand upright feet above the floor of Yosemite. It was off season, and off the trails, and it all wasn't done, but seeing that the imperious young gentleman insisted on the jaunt these picked guides were sent with him for protection. I don't know, but there are earmarks in the incident pointing to a certain amount of familiarity on the part of the young gentlemen with Alpine climbing. Matterhorn stuff. Anyhow, all unconsciously he got himself in a horrible pickle on a cliff to wit. The two guides, scrambling after the prince got themselves wedged somewhere between the blue vault and the nether eternity and the young prince was obliged to yank them up to save their lives. Such a bore! What?

Albert was of course a hero, acclaimed everywhere by the population of his latest ally, America. Naturally he had to step out on the observation platform at important places, receive the plaudits of the inhabitants, and bend his tall form in a courteous bow.

Merced was the junction city where the little Yosemite Railroad joins the Southern Pacific, California's main iron rail artery. So Albert had it in his head that when Merced was called out he was to do his stuff on the back platform. It was late in the evening, the queen was, eh—retired; and when Albert heard that word "Merced" he walked back.

It happened, however, to be Merced Falls, a small station of a saw mill. Some brawny, don't-give-a-damn lumberjacks and mill hands were standing about the train's end, hands in their jeans. That was all. And there was the King in his immaculate clothes looking down upon them amiably. It was a *most* embarrassing situation—for the lumberjacks, particularly who, of course, knew it was the "special" of the Belgian royal party. Finally a 250 pound log roller spoke up.

"By the way, King, did you get that sack of flour we sent you?"

"Sure did," says the King chuckling (exactly that way). "And thanks a lot!"

—THEO. S. SOLOMONS

Ghost Ship

NO ONE really knows the fate of the old *Lyderhorn*, used by Bill Adams in his story of this issue. Mr. Adams has given us his own dramatic interpretation; and we thought it an inspiring tribute to the heroic breed of men who officered the old windjammers.

Glad you liked "The Last of the 'Horns." I don't know just what did happen to the old *Lyderhorn*. She was posted missing in 1915, and had been bound east round the Horn for some European port. One of her old apprentices has written me a time or two since I first appeared in *Adventure* with names of the company's ship. I knew the *Matterhorn* well, and if I'd a dollar for every time I've stowed the *Silberhorn's* royals I'd have a nice little wad of jack. *Lyderhorn* was a big clumsy brute of 2700 tons register. But *Silberhorn* could whip along at better than fifteen miles an hour. I often think that if those big later ships had been manned as the clippers were manned, with large crews, and had carried all the sail they might have carried, they'd have made some very fine passages. But they'd just enough men, and usually barely enough, to handle them as they were—minus stun'sls and with no fore and afters above topmast staysails. As it was I've seen them pass the Horn in 52 days from Antwerp and Hamburg, etc. *Silberhorn's* skipper told me that only one ship ever passed him in the sixteen years he had her—*Muskoka*. And I steered her past many and many a fine ship myself when I was a nipper.

I don't know for sure what that four mast barque was that appeared in the haze while Von Spee was making his last fight. It was her first sign that war was on, no doubt. And I can picture the excitement aboard her.

I sailed a few days after the Spanish war started and all I ever knew of it was what we got from the ship *Belvedere*, which we met somewhere off the River Plate. She was almost too far away for signalling. To our question as to whether the war was still on she replied with one word 'War'. When we came in it was all over but the shouting. We did sight a steamer one dark squally night, and she altered her course to take a look at us. We doused our lights, piled on sail, and hid ourselves in a heavy squall, thinking that she might be a cruiser. Never saw her again. The squall sent us along at our best clip, which was very possibly more than she could do with her engines. It was always good fun to come up on and sail by a steamer in those days! But the worst cussing ever I heard was when we'd sight some infernal kettle and signal her, asking to be reported, after maybe 100 days at sea without seeing anything at all in the way of a ship, and she'd pompously ignore the signals of the old windjammer. Some stuck-up brass buttoned bridge ornament who'd never laid hand on a brace in his life on her bridge, I suppose.—BILL ADAMS.

For a Gallery in China

ANYBODY have an autographed picture of the Bard of Aberystwyth or of the President of Andorra or of the next President of the United States for the clubrooom wall of these *bons soldats* on the other side of the earth?

I am writing you a letter for the men of my company and making of you a rather peculiar request.

This company holds the regimental record for having gone seven and a half months with a clean health record. When you consider the conditions under which the soldier derives his recreation, this record is one to be proud of. He is greeted at every turn by local cafés and dives, few, if any, respectable white women for associates, liquor plentiful and cheap and also drugs are everywhere for the asking. This record, made by this company is due to their own personal interest in the company and not due to my efforts. One of the principal features of the company is the clubroom. In this clubroom we have one of the most complete collections of autographed photographs of prominent people in the service. It is in connection with this feature I am writing you to assist us.

Your magazine reaches places on the globe that no other magazine reaches; this is indicated by the interesting letters appearing in the Camp-Fire and elsewhere. Pictures of isolated, unknown spots are most interesting and also very rare. Could you make a request of your readers that if they could, to send to the company photographs of chiefs of tribes, natives, etc., in distant parts of the world, with their autographs in native writing. This autograph to read: "To the men of Co. K, 15th U. S. Inf.", with the signature. We are most desirous of securing foreign countries as they will mean a lot in the collection. As these photographs are all framed individually, if possible a size about 8 x 10 would be most desirable.

I can assure you your cooperation in assisting us in this connection will be appreciated. We have been subscribers to *Adventure* for several years and the men thoroughly enjoy the interesting stories. Trusting that you will aid us in the collection, that we will receive replies from all over the world through your kindness.—CAPTAIN F. J. PEARSON, 15th Inf., Tientsin, China.

Sailors Visit Stamboul Bazar

In his shrewdest Levant jargon,
Ali drives an easy bargain:
"Caviar, a red skullcap,
Bubble pipe, and parrot trap,
Ancient blade from old Damascus—
Buy them all?"
"Yes, sir, why ask us?"

—VICTOR WEYBRIGHT

Old Copies

EXCEPT for the magazine files, we have no numbers of *Adventure* older than 1927. Since every now and then a request comes for issues previously published, I take the liberty of stating that Mr. Charles F. Pape, 114 East 238th Street, New York City, wishes to dispose of a file of *Adventure*, complete from Vol. 1 to Vol. 45.

Checking Error

COMRADE JESSUP questions a point made in a recent story by Captain Frederick Moore. It seems to us that the author defends himself and his story, competently.

A frog-pond sailor, from the outer edge of the firelight, arises questing information.

Captain Frederick Moore, in "The Lagoon of the Secret Pearls," March 1st number, page 166, says:

> Prouse slanted his sextant horizontally at the after bulkhead, checking the error of the instrument . . .

Please tell us what "error" he is checking, and the manner and method thereof.

Old Prouse musta been a bear for chasing logarithms 'round the cabin to chase noon sights on a sixty mile run between islands with high peaks. That on Lumbucanan musta been at least 310 feet high; and we are told of Surago's "high peaks." So one of the islands would have been in sight all the way, from aloft, except for current, and perhaps even then.

But it was a good story, at that.

—W. D. JESSUP

Follows Captain Moore's reply:

Mr. Jessup's question about how Captain Prowse checked the error of his sextant in the cabin probably arises from the fact that Mr. Jessup was misled into the belief that it was index error. The story did not say that. Prowse might have been assuring himself of an error known to exist at times, or he may have made repairs to his sextant, and by marks on the bulkhead wall made sure the instrument was in adjustment, such as homemade crosswires in the sextant telescope, or that the line of sight was parallel to the plane of the instrument, or some other deviation from normal in certain adjusting screws. The incident indicated in some degree the fact that Prowse was rather rough in his navigation, just as the fact that he counted seconds when he went down the companionway after an observation gave some insight into the type of navigator he was. Not all old-school skippers do things that are good practice, some have whims, some do things not heard of in navigation schools, and such things in a story pertain to the character and are not intended as a treatise on navigation. I did not draw Prowse as a navigator who would be using Bygraves Slide Rule to solve astronomical triangles with the tables of Aquino. Many times navigators find fault with what a skipper does in a story, forgetting the fact that the man depicted has peculiarities or defects which are brought out for the very purpose of making a point, and to make the skipper different from the normal run of persons.

Mr. Jessup's objection to the fact that Prowse had to chase noon sights to find his position, is probably due to the fact that Mr. Jessup believed the schooner to be on a line of position joining the islands of Surago and Lumbucanan, with visibility of peaks from aloft. The story did not put the schooner in such a position, and in any event, a sailing vessel cannot always run down a straight course, if the wind does not serve, or the chart shows shoals or other dangers, on that line joining a pair of islands. Also, the skipper was not certain at first that he wanted to pick up Marson and Sears, but was doubtful about what to do; besides, the story shows the vessel in a dead calm, and drifting with a current, with her wake abeam. And Chapter X at the beginning says the schooner for days had been beating up to the island, after days of calm, and again headed by winds. He was far from Lumbucanan and baffled by winds. Didn't he swear about being unable to get back to Lumbucanan when he decided to go? He was not between the two islands, and could not possibly have them in sight from aloft. It would be advisable for a skipper to chase noon sights when he does not know his position in such waters, and I should want to know course and distance to the landfall I wanted, and about the best way to get a fix is to take noon sights, even with a sextant that might make a good rattle to scare crows out of a cornfield. Prowse was not reporting the noon position of a battle cruiser to the fleet commander, or he would have better instruments and be a different type of navigator. He would hardly waste time with noon sights if he could find island peaks from the cross-trees.—FREDERICK MOORE

Sounds Reasonable!

HERE is a comrade equipped with everything but a companion. I suspect that by April twentieth he will be provided for in that manner as well . . .

I have never taken advantage of your columns, but would like to do so at this time. I wish to take a three weeks' fishing trip this July, and do not seem to be able to find any companions. I have been considering the West but the distance in comparison with the time is too great. I have a car and for those near me it would be a pleasure to take week end trips near New York for the balance of the summer. I am not particular whether I camp, live at a farm house or otherwise. There must be several people near me in the same boat, and perhaps through your magazine connections can be made which will mean an everlasting friendship. Perhaps some fellows have a sister who likes the outdoors; and the ladies always break the monotony. I still don't believe there is a Santa Claus!

—P. GIBBONS, 152 East 42nd Street, N. Y. City

Bibliography

FOR THOSE who wish to go deeper into the uncanny mysteries of Easter Island.

In further reference to the inquiry of Mr. Leferink *re* Easter Island in the issue of Nov. 1, I note that Mr. Meagher does not give any literary references which your inquirer could use if he wished to go deeper into the matter.

The Smithsonian Institute published in its Annual Report for 1888-89, and reprinted separately in 1891, a very complete report of the expedition to Easter Island by Wm. J. Thomson, Paymaster, U. S. Navy.

Another brief illustrated article on the Island and its statues was published in the *London Magazine* of July, 1910, in support of the theory that the carvers of these monoliths were of the same people who left similar remains in Peru. This author says that the first known discoverer was a notorious South Sea buccaneer named Davis, in 1687.—N. W. J. HAYDON, Toronto, Canada.

Hints to the New Hand

Now listen, my lad, if you'd ship as a hand,
Far out at sea;
There's several salt customs you'd best understand,
Far out at sea:
Say "sir" to the Old Man; speak civil to Misters;
Heave over to leeward them socks of your sister's;
Pipe down, an' step lively—or stand by for blisters
Far out at sea!

When sent after gadgets or pails of fresh steam,
Far out at sea,
Be sure from your eyes to let innocence beam,
Far out at sea!
When ordered the runnin'-lights lanterns to fill,
Beg green oil for starb'd (as told by Big Bill)
An' red oil for port—then *run* with a *will!*
Far out at sea!

If missin' your mess-kid, remember this here,
Far out at sea:
Don't borrow what's known as the Extra Hand's gear,
Far out at sea!
Go shares with your bunkie—'tis better to wait,
Though slum may grow cold, than to meddle with Fate;
A colder meal's near—with the conger an' skate—
Far out at sea!

Keep clear o' the hard-fisted hunkies called Finns,
Far out at sea;
There's more than just *man* in *their* double-spliced skins,
Far out at sea!
An' treat like an uncle with gold in his sock
The fat old gazabo that sailors call "Doc":
It ain't noways healthy the cookee to mock,
Far out at sea!

If ever the taffrail begins to grow damp,
Far out at sea,
An' surely she's settlin', liner or tramp,
Far out at sea,
As soon as she slides in her last long careen,
Just jump, an' don't struggle—Old Ocean is mean!
Breathe deep . . . There's good shipmates on Fiddler's Green . . .
Far out to sea!

—HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON

Songs of the Iron Horse

THE FOLLOWING request is entirely separate from the "Old Songs Men Have Sung" department of Ask *Adventure*. Railroaders who wish to cooperate with Mr. Van Sant by contributing to his collection of railroad songs will kindly address him in care of his publisher, as specified.

Mr. R. S. Van Sant of the Baltimore and Ohio is preparing an anthology of the songs railroad men sing or have sung in the past, and would very much appreciate it if railroad men would send in to him, in care of his publishers, Greenberg, Inc., 112 East 19th Street, New York, any and all songs of this kind that they know. If they don't know all the words he would like to have them send along the titles and the particular railroads to which the songs apply.

The Strongest Man Alive

I HAVE SEEN vaudeville professionals galore, but I always suspect them of hocus-pocus. Near Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin, I saw a sturdy farm boy go into the loft of a barn, attach straps and ropes to a harnessed jenny below—and then raise her a foot from the ground! At Sears, Roebuck's in Chicago—on the fifth floor of the printing building—there used to be a gorilla-like Bohemian laborer. This chap, for a bet of one dollar, would lift and carry across the floor, a few yards, one of these enormous and clumsy rolls of pulp paper. I am not sure now about the sort of paper used for catalogues back then, but awed men claimed each roll weighed more then 500 pounds!

I have seen a 150-pound guide carry one sixteen foot cedar canoe, one pack of rations and utensils, weighing about sixty pounds, three rifles, and a pail which had held minnow bait. This was after I and another 200-pound man from New York City had decided that the swamps of Minnesota were too hard to navigate, after six hours . . .

I just wonder if comrades have not many interesting yarns of this sort to tell? Camp-Fire space is open to anyone who actually has seen a strong man do his stuff. Of course nothing anonymous will be printed, as usual.—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services
you can't get elsewhere

Ships

STEERING devices, old and new. Deck plan and passengers' quarters of an old-timer.

Request:—"Will you please answer the following questions?

1. When were vessels first steered with a wheel? How were they steered before wheels were used?

2. Can you give me a general idea of the deck arrangement and the quarters for the passengers and crew of vessels sailing between Port Glasgow, Scotland and the Colonies of Virginia, North and South Carolina about the year 1730? Was the cabin full flush deck; that is, did it take the whole afterdeck from rail to rail? Was it the height of the cabin above the main deck? What deck houses were there?"—JOHN ANDERSON, Baltimore, Md.

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—I am sorry your letter was unanswered for so long; but I lost my vessel in the recent hurricane in the Bahamas, and all my affairs have been like the midshipman's sea-chest—everything on top and nothing handy.

Answering your queries:—

1. Wheels were used to steer ships almost as soon as the size of vessels made tiller steering too heavy for direct man strength. At no time did all vessels discard the tiller. The tiller is still used on small coasters in many instances. Before the wheel was devised the steering gear was simply a tiller with tackles. The relieving tackle of today is a survival of them. Before the tiller, a steer-oar was used.

2. As for deck plan and passengers' quarters of the vessels you mention, they varied greatly with the vessel's size. In general, the passengers' cabin was in a sort of half-poop, like a big trunk cabin of today, half of its height above the quarterdeck, and leaving a narrow alleyway between the side and the rail. Quarters for servants, emigrants, indentured persons, etc., were mostly in the 'tweendecks, but sometimes in a house on deck. Besides this large house there were sometimes a forward house and a galley, but often the galley was part of either one or other of the larger houses.

In smaller ships there might be no deck house except the galley, with an open forecastle-head under which was the forge, the carpenter's bench and the bosun's stores. In large vessels with full poops, as some of the finer West Indiamen, the passengers' quarters extended the full width of the stern, and sometimes were two decks deep. But in none of these vessels was there full headroom for a tall man except under a skylight. I think, however, that even with a full poop, decked from rail to rail, there were still bulwarks all around the stern, and not open rails as one sees today.

Horses

THE storied mustang, and others.

Request:—"Is there such a thing in the West as a full-blooded mustang, that is, a full-blooded descendant of the horses the Spaniards brought over?

Many people think that the mongrel scrubs running wild in the West at present are mustangs.

I have read articles by Major General Carter and several other writers in praise of the excellent qualities of the mustang: his superior endurance and even speed to the thoroughbred and other horses of the American pioneers. If the mustang was so good why was he allowed to die out or nearly so? One writer claims the mustang disappeared from the plains about 1880.

Does any one attempt to propagate the breed? I should think that he is at least as deserving as the Longhorn which they are trying to save; he played a much greater part in the history of the West.

Is it true that the mustang was tricky and vicious?

Could an Indian pony run all day? What is a Palomino? What does the word Palomino mean?

What do you consider the best breed or combination for a cow pony?

What do you consider the best breed for just plain riding in hilly and plain country?

Which do you prefer for riding—stallion, mare or gelding?

Do you know if Black Gold was part mustang?

Can you give me the names of any books written on the subject of the mustang, not fiction?"

—HAMILTON S. HUFFMAN, Buffalo, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Thomas W. Dameron:—General Carter is an eminent authority on horses. His and other writings on the mustang's qualities are true in every sense of the word, but apply only to the few developed from many worked on. It was a case of the survival of the fittest, and only those of strength and alertness survived the onslaught of their many natural enemies. Again, they were descendants of noble strain, some of the best Spanish strains, such as those bred by the Jennet family.

Interbreeding soon caused throw-backs to appear, giving us the pintos, etc. The infusion of thoroughbred blood by all the stockmen of the seventies and eighties, has caused them to change completely rather than disappear. I know of no genuine mustangs now, but it is probable that a few may be found in the most out-of-the-way places where it would be impossible to round them up for the soap factories.

I have heard of no one trying to propagate the breed, but agree with you they are far more deserving than the Longhorn. Think of what the feral horse did for the American Indian, and the early Western settlers and stockmen.

It is true that the mustang was tricky and vicious, which traits were instincts bred in him through generations of self-preservation. Properly broken and kindly handled, he was as faithful as our Kentucky thoroughbreds.

Yes, I believe an Indian pony or any good Western horse could lope all day, with the few breathing spells that would naturally come at creeks, etc. Of course no animal could run at highest speed all day without stopping to catch a breath.

Palomino is generally used to describe an animal with flaxen mane and tail, or generally a cream colored horse. It comes from the Spanish word *Palomilla*, pronounced pal-o-meel-lyah, meaning backbone of a horse, peak of a pack saddle, or a horse of milk white color.

As a matter of personal preference, I would and have always used, crossed standard bred-thoroughbred horses for cow-horses, polo ponies, and just hard plain or hilly riding, my argument being that the standard bred is bred to go a fast mile, come back in a few minutes and do three or four more heats. He has a level head, and, generally, good manners. The thoroughbred has the life, high headedness, and light feet we like, but is bred to run his mile or fraction and wait a day or two for his next one. Am I right?

I have no preference as to sex (most stockmen will ride nothing but a gelding). A properly broken stallion is just as trustworthy as a gelding. I will admit that most of my favorites have been mares. My favorite now is a sorrel mare from a standard bred dam and thoroughbred sire. I played her a season of polo at Broadmoor. She is ten years, and has never been beaten an eighth to a quarter. She has won many ribbons in lightweight hunter classes. She will show in any three gaited class, and will carry any cowpuncher through his day's work. She now has a fine yearling by her side. Could a man ask any more from one animal?

To enter the Kentucky Derby, a horse must be thoroughbred and registered; hence, if any mustang is in Black Gold it is many generations back.

As far as I know there are no books on mustangs. General Carter gave a chapter to them in his book, "Story of the Horse."

"Sho-Sho"

FAMOUS, but apparently found wanting in action.

Request:—"In your capacity as firearms expert for the *Adventure* magazine, will you please let me have some information on the following matters:

1. What was the Sho-Sho gun of which one occasionally reads in Leonard H. Nason's war stories?

2. What are the general specifications of the Mondragon automatic rifle? Is it still procurable? If so, from whom?

With reference to (1), I have read in Messrs. Francis Bannerman & Sons' catalogue that the French are experimenting with this rifle in a short form, with a view to arming their forces with it. Can you inform me whether this short form is procurable commercially?"—W. H. BLYTH, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Reply, Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The "sho-sho" referred to by Comrade Nason was nothing more nor less than that French Chauchat semi-automatic rifle, the light machine gun used by Infantry, as was our Lewis and yours. Just ask any returned Anzac what he thought of the Chauchat, and you'll learn why the boys swore at them.

They seem to have been the least reliable arm used by any of the combatants of either party during the War, and I've never yet heard a good word spoken of them by any one.

I have never heard of the Mondragon being made commercially, and doubt very much if such will ever be the case; in fact, I only know of one arm being made for commercial uses today in any portable model, that being the Thompson sub-machine gun, so favored of our bandits and hootch runners. It is made in .45 caliber, taking the automatic pistol ammunition, at present, but I believe can be furnished also, on special demand, for the Luger ammunition in .30 and .36 (7.65 and 9 mm. respectively) and up to the .351 Winchester self-loading cartridge in power.

Personally, I am not taken to any degree with the Mondragon rifle, and believe our own Browning-Colt, or your Lewis, to be far superior as a weapon goes, to anything yet seen.

As to the makers of the Mondragon, I can not say, but suspect that it is being made for the French army, if at all, by the Government Arsenal at St. Etienne, France. A letter to them might produce the information as to manufacture, but I don't believe they would state anything as to intent to arm the troops with the rifle.

Tungsten

ON THE distribution, marketing and uses of this metal.

Request:—"I am very much interested in the metal known as tungsten and would appreciate very much, information as indicated in the following questionnaire:

Is it a fact that the only tungsten produced in the U. S. is mined at Boulder, Colo.?

Are the mines there substantial and likely to produce in any quantities for a considerable period?

Is there an active market for this metal?

What are the main uses to which this metal is put?

Is tungsten production likely to be of major importance in the near future?"—THOS. J. GIVEN, Houston, Tex.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Your first query—"Is the only tungsten producing mine at Boulder, Colo?" is answered no, but the Wolf Tongue Co. at Boulder produces the only tungsten ferberite. The Nevada-Massachusetts outfit near Mill City, Nevada, produces tungsten from scheelite; it also comes from Round Valley near Bishop, Cal. The Homestake Co., of South Dakota, mines wolframite; and tungsten from wolframite comes also from Tip Top, Arizona and from near Silvermine, Missouri. There is also a tungsten property mining scheelite at Atolia, Cal. The U. S. A. formerly imported close to 2000 tons.

The need for this metal to toughen steel stimulated mining and prospecting during the late war. There was a big slump from 1919-1922. Lack of war demand caused the slump and left large stocks of tungsten ore on hand. Then a high protective tariff on this metal went into effect on Sept. 22, 1922, which stopped imports and had a stimulating effect on internal affairs. The stocks on hand were absorbed slowly, mining was resumed very gradually, and in 1928 the Tungsten Products Co., operating the Pine Creek tungsten mine near Bishop, Cal. produced an average of 4000 tons of ore per month, with 200 tons per day coming out of the mine when all was moving properly. (See "Tungsten Deposits of NW Inyo County"—Bull. 640-L, U. S. Geological Survey, Wash., D. C.)

I was at the Boulder tungsten district in 1923. The Wolf Tongue people were doing a little spasmodic development, the rest of adjacent properties—nothing but assessment. No market, and tungsten property was unsalable. Now, there is quite a bit of stimulation and many mines are working full time, while the market is active at $12 for wolframite, and $13 for scheelite. Price risen from $8-$9 at close of 1925.

Bullfrogs

ON RAISING them for market.

Request:—"I am writing to you hoping I can get some information on breeding and raising bullfrogs."—L. D. MAY, Pleasantville, N. J.

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—Your letter of December 14th has just been forwarded to me and I hasten to reply.

A booklet on frog raising has been published by the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries and may be obtained by writing to Washington, D. C. The author is A. H. Wright. This booklet is of a practical nature and I am sure will give you the specific information that you wish.

Automotive

VARIOUS problems of interest to the man who drives a car.

Request:—"I wish to ask information in regard to cold weather starting. In the first place I wish to say that I drive a 1925 model 31 Cleveland 6. I have had this car in various garages and electric service stations and the starting motor is in as good condition as it is possible to be made. This car is equipped with the Bosch system of starting, lighting, and ignition. Nevertheless it seems that this car is hard to start in cold weather. I had just had the battery tested a few days before and it registered fully charged. I had the ignition system checked over and in the crankcase was an oil that was *supposed* to flow at ten degrees below zero. I say 'supposed' because that is what the company making this oil told me.

I generally use what is termed as high test gasoline because I understand that high test vaporizes quicker. Recently I have been using Sinclair Aircraft. Are these high test gasolines or aviation gasolines the same that aviators use? I have an Alemite Gasolator on the gas line. Does this filter out any water which may be in the gasoline and cause it to freeze? Is there any gasoline which will vaporize in below zero temperatures?

Is there any oil on the market which will remain fluid in below zero temperatures? Any that will allow the starter to turn over freely? Another thing, about crankcase heaters. I know of the Coleman Crankcase Heater Co. which heats the oil when the motor is started. But these heaters heat the oil *after* the motor is started. Are there any crankcase heaters which will heat the oil *before* the motor is started? I mean, so a motorist could step in his car and push a button, pull a lever, or something of that sort and the oil in the crankcase becomes heated for an easy start?

Now about the starter. I have had the starter checked over by experts and they proclaim it O. K. At present, I have a good U. S. L. thirteen plate battery in the car. I understand that a thirteen plate battery is more powerful than an eleven plate battery. I have heard that the new Oakland is equipped with a fifteen plate battery. Would that be more powerful than a thirteen plate battery? If two batteries were hooked up would that make the starter twice as powerful? I hope that I have made this letter clear and explained all that I wish to know. By the way, I always throw out the clutch before stepping on the starter in cold weather."

—ELMER HALKER, Rockford, Ill.

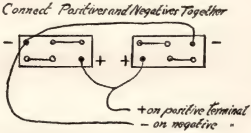
Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—It would appear from the nature of your trouble relative to "hard starting" of the engine in your car, that basically the trouble is due to the battery. Although a thirteen plate battery has a greater capacity than an eleven plate, it is often the case that the amount of current required by the starting motor is so large that the voltage is reduced below that which will properly operate the ignition system. Ignition systems as a rule are designed to give a firing spark at voltages well below the nominal 6 volts constituting the open circuit voltage of the battery itself, but even though this is the case, cold weather so reduces the efficiency of the battery that it sometimes is not able to maintain a sufficiently high voltage to deliver a spark through the ignition coil. The remedy for this condition is the use of a larger battery of fifteen plates as you suggest, or even larger if you have room enough to install one of seventeen or more plates. I have found personally that the larger batteries not only last much longer in service, thus being worth the difference in price, but often overcome the trouble of difficult starting.

With reference to gasoline, it can be said that the aircraft fuels vaporize much more rapidly than those originally used in motor cars, and if the aircraft gasoline you are now using conforms to or is better than Government Specifications for aviation gasoline, it should be easier to start with this grade than with the ordinary kinds, *provided* that the battery is delivering sufficient voltage to cause a spark to jump at the plugs, for obviously, no matter what type of fuel is used it is impossible to start unless the plugs are firing. Fuel strainers of the type you mention do remove water from the gasoline, and if this is permitted to accumulate in the strainer may cause stoppage of flow if frozen. However, it requires the presence of quite a little water to block the flow of fuel with most gasoline strainers.

While some of the special gasolines vaporize to some extent at low temperatures, the amount of vaporization is comparatively small at below zero temperatures. On the other hand, inability to vaporize at such low temperatures is greatly offset by the fact that the engine compression raises the temperature prior to the time the mixture is fired. However, I would suggest that you try a mixture of one-third ethyl ether, sometimes called sulphuric ether, and two-thirds gasoline injected directly into the cylinders through the petcocks, (if installed on your engine), or through a petcock mounted on the inlet manifold. If a start is not secured with this mixture you may conclude that the plugs are not firing, for I know from personal experience that this ether mixture can be fired at temperatures well below zero, or in fact under any low temperature conditions.

With reference to oils, those with low cold test are much better than those which solidify at fairly high temperatures. In this connection, you might try using a winter grade of aviation oil, although oils of this kind are much more expensive than ordinary ones, sometimes costing more than twice as much.

While it is possible to hook up two batteries, they should be arranged *in parallel* in accordance with the following sketch and *not in series*, for if hooked up in series 12 volts would be delivered, which in turn would probably injure the starting motor, and possibly the ignition coil, particularly if 12 volts were permitted to flow after the engine was warmed up, and to arrange a series circuit of this kind to eliminate such a difficulty would result in complication, and at the same time but little would be gained. The parallel mounting, although delivering no greater theoretical voltage, would permit of maintaining a higher actual voltage, since you would have the equivalent of twice the number of plates in the battery, which in turn are responsible for establishing the minimum voltage drop, caused by the heavy discharge required when operating the starting motor.



While crankcase heaters are of value in thinning the oil, they would not assist you unless you had one of the electrical type, which could be turned on prior to the time the engine is started. These heaters have an electrical resistance unit which heats the oil before the engine is started. However, I do not believe such elaborate equipment is necessary if you use a good grade of oil, and install a larger battery, or two batteries as arranged in the above sketch. Your method of releasing the clutch when starting is of value, since it eliminates the drag of the transmission gears.

In addition to the above suggestions to use two batteries, and to try the other gasoline mixture, it is possible to install an electric choke coil in the ignition system, which will slightly boost the voltage at the coil when starting. The use of such a coil is, however, extremely dangerous, and it must be thrown out of the circuit immediately after starting, as it will burn out the ignition coil except at extremely high engine speeds. At the same time, it can be used only with a very large battery, so that until you try this and the other suggestions, I would rather not give you details about such a device, as they are not used nor ordinarily recommended by electrical engineers, due to the danger of destroying the coil unit and burning of contact points, etc.

Fish

BAIT for small-mouth bass.

Request:—"I would like to know the different kinds of bait to use for small-mouth bass, also the time of season each should be used. We have fresh water fishing here. Last season I used live minnows but at times they are hard to get."

—X. Y. Z., York, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—I presume you refer to artificial baits for small-mouth bass, since at times you have no success with live minnows. Bait casting for them with bassorenos and kindred wooden plugs brings results most times during the fishing season, particularly if you watch when the fish go to the pockets and shallows to feed; which, in the warm weather, is generally very late in the evening or early in the morning.

Spinners, with pork rind and feathered flies attached, are also successfully used. In using a fly rod, I have great luck casting the cork bodied bass bugs, and using the standard underwater bass flies and keeping out of sight of the fish, as much as possible. You know small-mouth bass like to be near the rocks, moss and weeds. Many times, they will not strike if there is no ripple on the water. Let a breeze come up and immediately they become active. I think the reason of this is that they are looking for prey under those conditions and feel both that they are invisible for some distance to their prey and, also, the ospreys that often attack them.

Hide

HOW to cure a green one.

Request:—"I would like any information you could give me on the subject of the removal of the hair of a green hide before tanning.

I have inquired at several book stores for this information but the best they can do is to refer me to you."—B. E. HEITZMAN, San Diego, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Seth Bullock:—Clean hide of all fat and flesh and dry with salt. When thoroughly dry soak it in clear water for a few days until soft and pliable. Inspect frequently to see that it is soaking up the water evenly, using your knife to shave down thick or hard spots. The skin must be of the same pliability all over. When completely saturated and the hard spots shaved down, mix a solution of water and slaked lime (be sure the lime is slaked or it will burn and ruin the skin) as follows:

One pint slaked lime to one gallon water. Mix enough to cover the skin completely when you immerse it.

Place the hide in this solution and work it around in it until you are sure that the lime has reached all parts of the skin. Keep the hide in this solution until the hair is very loose. When the hair pulls from the hide almost at a touch the skin should be removed and not before. Then take the hide from the lime, tack it up flat with the hair side up and with your knife or other instrument as a scraper scrape away all the hair *and the grain of the skin.* It should come away with the hair and can be recognized by the fact that the grain is slightly darker than the skin underneath.

Navigation

BOOKS for home study.

Request:—"I am writing you to find out if you could advise me of any way I could take up navigation in my spare time. I have made a few trips to sea and put six months on a small schooner on the Chesapeake, but at the present am working ashore. I will appreciate any information you can give me and any books you could recommend."

—NORMAN MORRILL, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Harry E. Rieseberg:—I would advise you to write to Motor Boat Publishing Co., 10 East 39th Street, New York, N. Y., and secure such books as the following:

Elements of Navigation (Henderson)	$1.50
Modern Seamanship (Knight)	7.00
Practical Navigation (Cugle)	6.00
Simplified Navigation (Poor)	.75

South

OPPORTUNITIES in the fishing industry in the Gulf States.

Request:—"Would you kindly inform me as to the possibilities in the fishing industry of the South?

I have for some time figured on trying my luck somewhere along the Gulf of Mexico. However, have not been able to make up my mind what part of this vast stretch of coast to drop my hook in.

What types of boats are used, sail or gas, and what are the prices?

When does the red snapper season begin and how long does it last? Are marketing conditions favorable, and marketing places frequent along the Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida coasts?

Must I obtain a license to engage in general fishing for the market in any or all of the aforementioned States?

Is there any market for salted fish?

Are shrimp caught along the entire Gulf Coast?

How is the hunting in those States?

Is there an open season on wild ducks and geese?

Is shark-fishing a paying proposition and what are the best markets?

Is the use of a seine permitted and practical, or are only gillnets used?

Is there any possibility of coastwise trading, meaning only legal articles?"—CARL C. HAAS, San Francisco, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Hapsburg Liebe:—Commercial fishing is not strictly in my line, but I do know a little about it. Nearly all the commercial fishermen I know are poor men; those who have made good, most of them, established fish-houses and had their own outfits. It is a pretty difficult game, ordinarily.

I am not aware that there is a closed season on red snapper. This fish is taken on hook and line, hand-lines, you know, and usually brings a good price. To catch them one ordinarily goes far out, taking ice, and stays anywhere from three to ten days. There are plenty of marketing places; i. e., fish-houses.

Yes, you would need a license for commercial fishing, but it shouldn't cost very much. Salted fish? There must be a market for salted mackerel and salted mullet, since they are sold at retail in the markets. As for shrimp, I know only that there are shrimping outfits working out of Apalachicola, Pensacola, and Fernandina, Florida.

With regard to hunting in the States you name, there is always more or less of quail, with more or less of bigger game in the farther back sections. Game is not as plentiful, by any means, as it was only a few years ago. There has been so much hunting. Open seasons are tightening up now, and hunters' licenses are costing more, especially for non-residents, and perhaps this will increase the game supply somewhat.

There is an open season on wild duck. Don't know about geese for the present winter (incidentally, I have seen very few geese in the South). Game laws differ, not only in States but in counties in the same State, so much that it is hard to keep track of them. Write the State Game Warden, at the capital city of any State you wish to hunt in, and ask for free pamphlet copy of game laws, to be safe.

Shark-fishing? There was a company down at Ft. Myers that tried to make a success of it commercially, but I understand they petered out. I guess it would be a hard thing to make go.

I am told that seines are permitted, in salt water, on open shores, but not in passes, not for stop-netting, and that they may not be used above certain points in narrow bays and bayous. The seine is practical if it is long enough, for fish that come inshore; a power-boat is necessary to "lay the spread," of course.

As for coastwise trading, I don't know; it might work. I am enclosing a newspaper article having to do with this; perhaps you will find it of interest.

To get back to snapper-fishing—this is usually done on a schooner, a sea worthy vessel. Skipper, mate (when they have one), cook, and the men all work for "shares."

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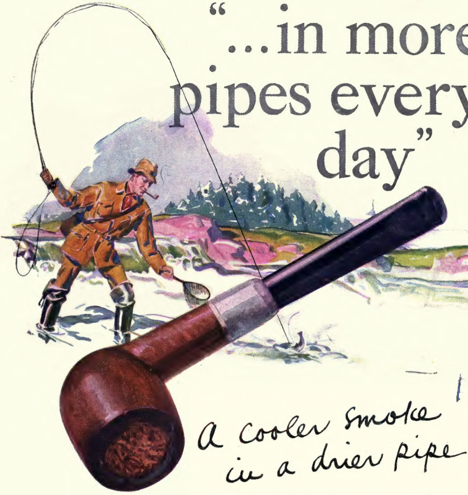

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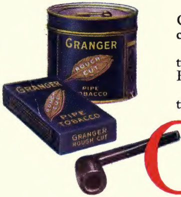
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